



QUENTIN ROOSEVELT'S CHINA

# Ancestral Realms of the Naxi

Edited by Christine Mathieu and Cindy Ho

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART / ARNOLDSCHÉ ART PUBLISHERS

QUENTIN ROOSEVELT'S CHINA  
Ancestral Realms of the Nazi

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# Ancestral Realms of the Naxi

Edited by Christine Mathieu and Cindy Ho

With contributions by

Martin Bräjen

Guo Dalie

He Limin

He Zhonghua

Cindy Ho

Lamu Gatusa

Christine Mathieu

Alexis Michaud

Silvia B. Sutton

Yang Fuquan Interview

Art Publishers



RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

ARNOLDSCHKE ART PUBLISHERS



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ARNOLDSCHE project coordinator  
Marion Boschka

Design  
nalbach typographik, Silke Nalbach, Mannheim

Offset-Reproductions  
Repromayer, Reutlingen

Printing  
gulde druck, Tübingen

#### Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Quentin Roosevelt's China : ancestral realms  
of the Naxi / edited by Christine Mathieu and  
Cindy Ho ; with contributions by Martin Brauen  
... [et al.].

p. cm.

Published in conjunction with an exhibition  
organized and presented by the Rubin Museum  
of Art, May 13-Sept. 19, 2011.

Includes bibliographical references and index.  
ISBN 978-0-9845190-1-9

1. Art, Naxi—Exhibitions. 2. Roosevelt, Quentin,  
1919-1948—Art collections—Exhibitions.

3. Rock, Joseph Francis Charles, 1884-1962—Art  
collections—Exhibitions. 4. Naxi (Chinese  
people)—China—Yunnan Sheng—Exhibitions.

I. Ho, Cindy. II. Mathieu, Christine. III. Brauen,  
Martin. IV. Rubin Museum of Art (New York,  
N.Y.) V. Title: Ancestral realms of the Naxi.

N7346.Y86Q46 2011

704.03'954—dc22

2011003753

ISBN 978-3-89790-343-2

#### Front Cover

Detail from Cat. No. 29

#### Back Cover

Detail from Cat. No. 29

#### Frontispiece

Detail from Cat. No. 23

#### Exhibition

Quentin Roosevelt's China: Ancestral Realms  
of the Naxi, organized by and presented at the  
Rubin Museum of Art from May 13 through  
September 19, 2011.

#### Photo credits

All photographs David de Armas  
except were noted

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internationally at selected bookstores and  
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#### CANADA:

NBN Canada, Toronto, [lpetriw@nbnbooks.com](mailto:lpetriw@nbnbooks.com)

#### UK / FRANCE:

ACC GB, Woodbridge, Suffolk,

[sales@accdistribution.com](mailto:sales@accdistribution.com)

#### BENELUX:

Coen Sligting Bookimport, Alkmaar,

[sligting@xs4all.nl](mailto:sligting@xs4all.nl)

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# Foreword

When Shelley and I began collecting Tibetan art, we knew very little about its deep and complex religious and historical significance. We acquired what we liked and let experts in the field interpret the iconography. And so, in those early days, we acquired some works that looked to us like Tibetan Buddhist paintings but were in a few cases Bon or Naxi. The art of the three traditions have some basic structural and aesthetic similarities, and the untutored admirer can easily confuse them. Once we began to learn more about these other traditions, we began to enjoy our few Bon and Naxi paintings even more.

Certainly compared to Tibetan Buddhist art, Bon and Naxi are relatively unknown. Thus we presented an exhibition on Bon art in 2007, and now, in 2011, we present a historically unprecedented exhibition of Naxi art and artifacts. The Naxi people are an ethnic minority living in southwestern China, where they practice an ancient religion called Dongba. An important part of Dongba religious practice is the use of scrolls to guide the deceased to heaven. Attached to the scrolls are manuscripts written in a pictographic language and read by the Dongba priests during funeral rites. This pictographic writing is the only living pictographic language in the world today.

Like other religions in revolutionary China, Dongba was repressed and many of its associated art and artifacts were hidden or destroyed. Since political reforms in 1979 allowed some relaxation of religious restrictions, the practice of the Dongba religion has seen a resurgence, and scholarly research into Naxi history has flourished. This exhibition and accompanying book will be the first major presentation of this material to the public. We hope the light shed on the story of the Naxi people by this project will encourage further study and will foster an appreciation of this little-known but rich culture.

Donald Rubin

Chart  
Northwestern Yunnan Province,  
China; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Pigments on cloth  
25 ¾ x 18 ½ in.  
(65.4 x 46.9 cm)  
Rubin Museum of Art  
C 2006.66.55  
Photograph Bruce M. White

## Lenders

Asian Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich

Harvard-Yenching Library of the Harvard College Library, Harvard University

Dr. John M. Lundquist

New York Public Library

Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University

Private Collection, New York

Private Collection, Spain

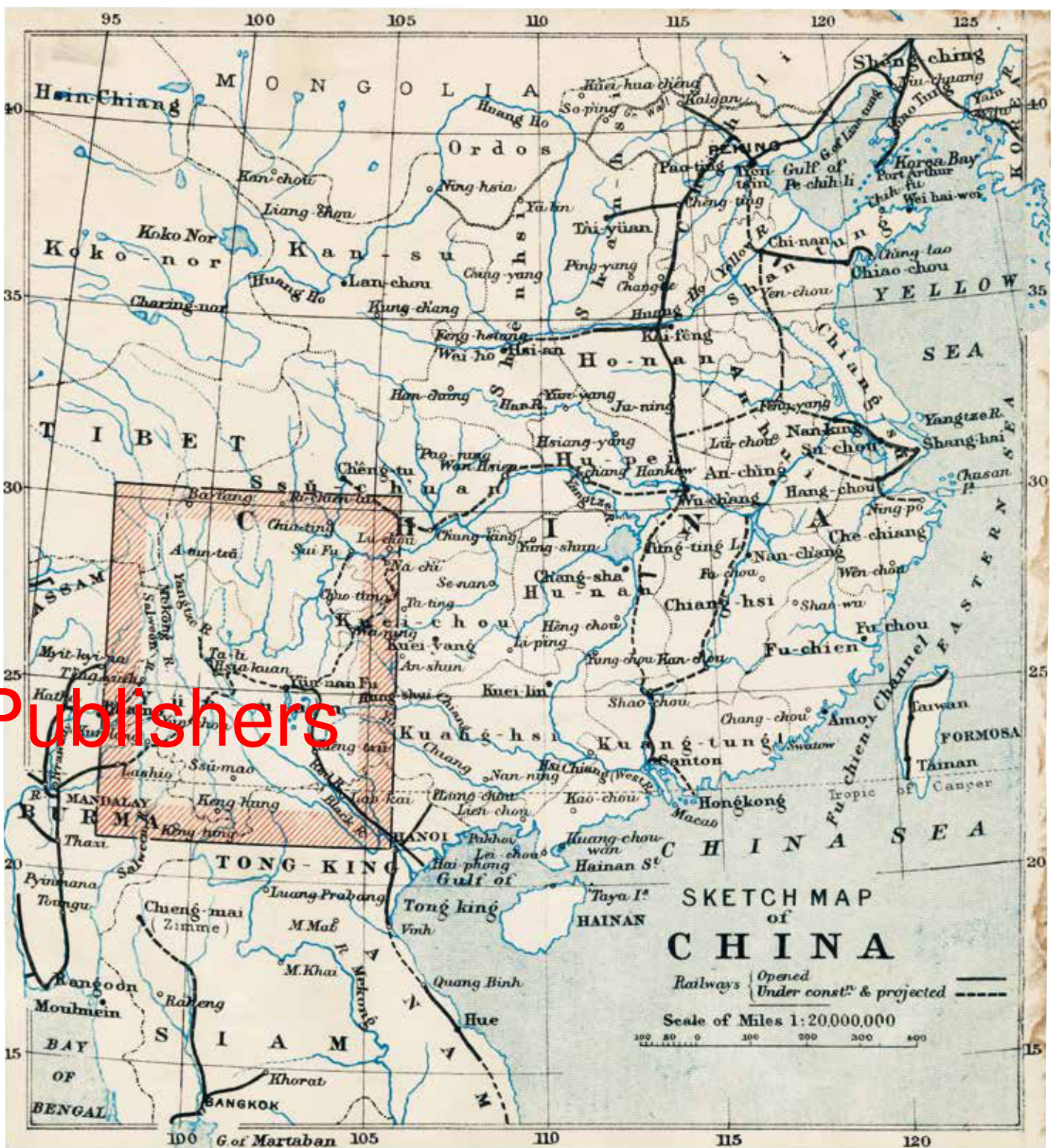
Alexandra Roosevelt Dworkin, Dr. Anna C. Roosevelt, Dr. Susan Roosevelt Weld

Shelley and Donald Rubin

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A map used by Quentin Roosevelt on his 1939 trip to Asia, showing, in black, routes taken.

# Notes to the Reader

Christine Mathieu (蓝诗田)

## On dating Dongba art

A distinction must be made between the age of the Dongba tradition and that of the objects now held in museum and private collections. Iconographic details and many ritual and narrative elements confirm that the Dongba tradition is several centuries old; however, Dongba priests did not date their ceremonial objects and works of art and mostly did not date their manuscripts. It is reasonable to assume that some of the works collected by Quentin Roosevelt and Joseph Rock are at least as old as the books they acquired along with them. Given the state of current knowledge, it is safe to conclude that the oldest works in this publication and related exhibition were produced in the eighteenth century, perhaps earlier, and the most recent toward the beginning of the twentieth century.

## The transcription and pronunciation of Naxi, Mosuo, and Chinese words

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For the greater part of the twentieth century, Chinese words used in English publications were mostly written in the Wade-Giles system of romanization, developed in the late nineteenth century. It has now been almost entirely replaced by the pinyin system, which was devised in China in the late 1950s. The different spellings of Chinese words found in various publications can be attributed to this change of system. Prior to the adoption of pinyin, for example, Lijiang was written Likiang, and Lichiang, and Zhongdian was written Chung-tian. Until the 1950s the Naxi were known as Mo-so (which today is written Mosuo) and there existed no standard transcription of the word "Naxi" in English. Thus, Rock wrote Na-khi and Quentin Roosevelt wrote Na-shi or Nashi.

Except for direct citations Chinese words in this book are reproduced according to current usage, with their spelling in the modern Chinese pinyin without the tone marks. The words Dongba and Daba are also transcribed in the Chinese pinyin rather than in the Naxi pinyin (Dobba and Ddaba) as their usage is now well established in English language publications produced in China and abroad. All other Naxi and Mosuo words are transcribed in the Naxi pinyin. Following the usage established for Chinese pinyin, I have omitted tone markers, which are indicated by the letters q and l for falling and high tones.

Since there is no unique Naxi or Mosuo language and since different pronunciations are encountered in different parts of Lijiang and Yongning, there are bound to be discrepancies between my transcriptions and those of my colleagues and Joseph Rock's. I have transcribed Naxi and Mosuo words on the basis of my fieldwork notes, and above all, from consultation with colleagues. I am especially grateful to He Limin, Lamu Gatusa, Yang Fuquan, and Alexis Michaud for their guidance on this subject. All errors, of course, are mine.

## The pronunciation of Chinese words

English speakers who are not specialists in Chinese studies will find that they are able to approximate the pronunciation of Chinese words without much difficulty. The pinyin system represents sounds close enough to English, except for the following letters:

### Consonants

c is pronounced ts // For example, Mou-bao Ah-cong is pronounced Mou-bao Ah-tsong.

g is always a hard g as in go

q can be approximated to ch // The word Qing (dynasty) is pronounced Ching.

x can be approximated to sh (or a Spanish s) // The word Naxi is pronounced na-shi.

z is sounded as dz // Mao Zedong is thus pronounced mao dze-dong.

### Vowels

a is always pronounced as in apple

i is pronounced as in six except when it ends a word and follows the letters ch, zh, s, or sh, where it is basically silent, sounding the consonants only.

Thus, li is pronounced lee and shi is pronounced shr.

Where two vowels are present, as in ao and ui, both vowels are sounded.

Dao is thus pronounced da-o and Hui is pronounced Hu-i.

But uo is pronounced o

The word Mosuo is therefore pronounced mo-so.

## Pronunciation of Naxi and Mosuo words

The Naxi pinyin is mostly read like Chinese pinyin, but readers need to distinguish the following letters:

### Consonants

ss is pronounced [ z ] or z as in the English zoo

dd is pronounced [ d ] or nd

bb is pronounced [ b ] or mb

### Vowels

i is pronounced [ i ] as in six

ei is pronounced [ e ] as in set

ai is pronounced [ æ ] or a-i

e is pronounced [ ə ] as in dirt

ee has no equivalent in English, and its IPA representation is [w]; for the sake of readability, the sound [ ə ] can substitute as an English approximation.



## PROLOGUE

# Quentin Roosevelt's China: Eighteen Years in the Making

Cindy Ho (何重嘉)

When I was traveling in China in 1992, I had not planned to visit Yunnan Province. A Yangzi (長江) River cruise was meant to be the end of my trip along the Silk Road, but I had a few extra days to fill since an avalanche in Pakistan cut the trip short. As the boat glided through the sulfuric air wafting from silk factories along the shore near Wanxian (萬縣), an American tour guide named Atom Constantino told me about Lijiang (麗江), a place far upstream in Yunnan (雲南), which means “south of the clouds” in Chinese.<sup>1</sup> At the first bend in the river, he said, where deep canyons cut through alpine mountains, I would find crisp air and clear water running through canals that crisscrossed an ancient town of cobblestones. Then he added, “I once saw a naked woman in the middle of the market square, wrapping and unwrapping herself with a piece of white cloth”; I was instantly intrigued.<sup>2</sup>

Two weeks later I was in Yunnan, on the road from Kunming to Dali (大理). Crossing the red earth where green terraces climb the hillsides to meet a perfect blue sky, I almost missed my tour guide's stories about Luo Ke (洛克), an American who had lived in the area for decades until the late 1940s. On that first day in the land south of the clouds, only the clouds were missing.

I enjoyed Dali and its many kinds of fresh mushrooms and bamboo shoots, but I began to think about Lijiang. By dinnertime, I had convinced Yang Yener (楊燕英), my guide, to make a seven-hour detour to Lijiang.<sup>3</sup>

Our 7:30 a.m. bus zigzagged uphill, and I shivered in the shadow of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain (玉龍雪山). As soon as we arrived in Lijiang we headed to Mama Fu's Café, one of a handful of eateries that catered to the few adventurous backpackers. Huddled next to a brazier and facing the street, I noticed there were hardly any tourists. In fact, there were few people at all. Lijiang was quiet, compared to the rest of China I had seen at the time. In 1992, about 30,000 tourists visited Lijiang County. Ten years later, the number would jump to more than three million.<sup>4</sup>

P.1  
(left) Black Dragon Pool.

P.2  
(right) Yunnan Dongba Culture  
Research Institute.  
All photographs in this chapter by  
Cindy Ho, unless noted



After eating Yunnan noodles and American apple pie at Mama Fu's, we went to the Black Dragon Pool Park (黑龍潭公園). Yenfen, my guide, wanted to show me pictographs that she said were "like Egyptian hieroglyphs" at the Yunnan Dongba Culture Research Institute (東巴文化研究所). There I met He Kaixiang (和開祥), a priest of the Dongba religion practiced by the Naxi people in Lijiang and surrounding areas.<sup>5</sup>

As we sipped Snow Tea, He showed us his drawings. Expressive and expertly painted in brilliant colors on rice paper, they appeared at once simple and sophisticated. Every mark had its place but looked spontaneous and alive at the same time. Even straight lines seemed animated.

The drawings were pictographs, a written script used by Dongba priests. He explained, and the one in my hand more or less told a mythical tale. Next, he showed me ancient books written with black ink on paper made from the bark of trees. It was the same script—the lines were even more simple but just as beautiful. Parading between horizontal lines, the deceptively childlike markings held the mysteries of an early religion. They did not look Egyptian at all. He smiled as I asked for the meaning of each symbol. "Don't worry, enjoy the pictures." By the time I left Lijiang and Dongba He Kaixiang, my extraordinary journey into the world of the Naxi had already begun.

I returned to the United States determined to find out more about the people behind the script. I searched the materials on the Naxi and the Dongba religion in the New York Public Library's Asian Division.<sup>6</sup> Most of the books were written by Joseph Rock, or Luo Ke, the same man I had heard about on my first day in Yunnan.<sup>7</sup>



P.3 a–c  
Dongba He Kaixiang and his pictographic artwork. He was one of the few Dongba priests who contributed to a compilation of the entire canon of Dongba scriptures, created by the Dongba Culture Research Institute in an effort to preserve them. This monumental task culminated in the 2001 publication of the 100-volume Ancient Naxi Dongba Literature.





I noticed that a "Q. Roosevelt" had collected Dongba material for Harvard-Yenching Library and the Library of Congress.<sup>8</sup> A source from Harvard informed me that "Q. Roosevelt" was a certain Quentin Roosevelt from New York, but an article by him in *Natural History* told me who he was.<sup>9</sup> A grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt, the nineteen-year-old Harvard student had traveled to Lijiang in 1939, at the height of the Sino-Japanese War, in search of Nazi artifacts. His trip was also covered in *Life* magazine and various society columns.<sup>10</sup>

Roosevelt wrote about his adventures in fearless detail, but what most struck me was the way he presented the items he collected. He described a "vigorous and refreshing artistic style." Yet, interested as he was in these objects as art rather than exotica or trophies, he never lost sight of their scientific importance and of what they could contribute to our knowledge of the Naxi.

More than a half century later, my own quest for knowledge about the people behind the Dongba pictographs led me to the idea of producing an exhibition about the Naxi.

I spent most of the next ten years planning the exhibition. First, I needed to find the artifacts and verify that the ones Roosevelt had acquired still existed. In June 1993, I saw the collection at Harvard-Yenching Library. Then I visited Quentin Roosevelt's widow, Frances, in Oyster Bay, New York.

Mrs. Roosevelt was warm and gracious. She seemed to understand my fascination for the Naxi. At this first meeting, Mrs. Roosevelt unrolled two banners her husband had brought back, painted by the Naxi.<sup>11</sup> The style was highly graphic, unlike any other art I had seen, but reminiscent of the pictographs I saw in Lijiang. There were more, she said. In the attic were trunks full of her husband's Naxi objects, unseen for more than fifty years. She invited me back to look at them, and she agreed to an exhibition of her husband's collection of Naxi objects. It was what he would have wanted, she said.

Just before I left, Mrs. Roosevelt handed me a scrapbook filled with mementos and her own watercolor paintings,<sup>12</sup> journals written by Quentin Roosevelt during his trips to

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P.4  
Dongba He Jigui helping  
the author understand  
pictographic manuscript.



China, and a hefty volume—a copy of his 1941 Harvard honors thesis entitled “A Preliminary Study of the Nashi People—Their History, Religion, and Art.”<sup>13</sup>

Quentin Roosevelt had not only acquired Nazi artifacts and written about them in a popular journal, he had also produced a detailed study. Illustrated with his own photographs and diagrams, his undergraduate thesis shows remarkable insight, charm, and skill. As the only academic thesis on Nazi art in Western scholarship to this day, it exhibits tremendous courage in its original interpretations and analyses.<sup>14</sup>

Thanks to this thesis, journals, and news articles, I was able to find everything Roosevelt had collected for the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. I also contacted Joseph Rock’s biographer, Silvia B. Sutor, who became my most accessible source of information about Rock.<sup>15</sup>

I returned to Lijiang three times, traveling as far as the local buses would take me and continuing on foot where the road stopped. I wanted to explore the villages Roosevelt and Rock had written about.

To reach Baoshan Stone Village (寶山石城) where ancestors of the Naxi Mu clan were known to have lived, I hiked up and down a hill on a narrow unmarked trail used by pack mules.<sup>16</sup> From the foot of the hill, Baoshan was visible, perched atop a limestone rock and ringed by one hundred Naxi homes, like a jeweled crown.

I pursued all known leads to uncover any other collections of Naxi Dongba artifacts that might have existed. In London I looked at manuscripts at the Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library. I searched for other collections Rock had written about, but it took another fifteen years before I finally knew their whereabouts.<sup>17</sup> I contacted other museums and libraries around the world, sought help through advertisements in academic journals, and wrote to family members of colleagues of both Roosevelt and Rock. In the end, I concluded that what was needed for the exhibition was already in place, collected by Quentin Roosevelt.

Now that I had found the objects, I needed someone to authenticate them. With a grant from the Asian Cultural Council in 1995, I arranged for Zhu Baotian at the Yunnan Provincial Museum in Kunming, to come to the United States for this purpose. He also came to measure and catalog everything Roosevelt collected. When our project ended, Harvard-Yenching Library and the Library of Congress appointed him to do similar work with their entire manuscript collections, the majority of which came from Rock.<sup>18</sup> Zhu also categorized and annotated all the manuscripts. Many of these have been digitized and compose the largest online collection of Dongba manuscripts assembled thus far.<sup>19</sup>

P.5 a,b

(left) Author viewing artifacts with Zhu Baotian in Frances Roosevelt’s home.

(right) Frances Roosevelt showing her scrapbook.

Photographs by Cheung Ching-Ming for the Asian Cultural Council

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Still, the project needed an expert with deep knowledge about how the artifacts were used and what their rich iconography represented. Most important, someone was needed to explain who the Naxi are and to convey their history. I also wanted to find an authority on Dongba art. I reached out to everyone I knew who had studied the Naxi, but these leads came up empty. Even Rock, the father of Naxi studies, did not write about the objects as art.

In 1997 I was introduced to Christine Mathieu. An ethnohistorian who had lived in northwestern Yunnan and had studied Naxi and Mosuo cultures and history since 1989, she had just received confirmation of her doctorate for her thesis on Naxi and Mosuo history, "Lost Kingdoms and Forgotten Tribes." We decided to work together, and the project gained momentum. We also wanted to produce a book. In 1998, with another grant from the Asian Cultural Council, we returned to China to further research and to consult Dongba priests specifically about the Roosevelt objects.

We had the objects, the information, and the expertise to create an exhibition, but we did not have a venue. The biggest obstacle was the fact that virtually no one had heard of the Naxi people or seen their art. Except for a handful of anthropologists and linguists, no one had written about the Naxi in academic publications. Also, no one spoke about the Naxi Dongba artifacts as art.

Years went by. Unexpectedly, in the summer of 2009, the Rubin Museum of Art contacted me regarding a possible Naxi exhibition and accepted my proposal to build one around Quentin Roosevelt's collections. I was pleased, and compelled, to put all of my other work on hold to return to what I had started in 1992. Christine was also willing to complete what we had begun. The project came back to life.

The fact that Quentin Roosevelt's *China: Ancestral Realms of the Naxi* took eighteen years to realize has turned out to be a blessing. The Rubin Museum of Art is the perfect venue, and we can expand on the original exhibition concept by including objects from the collections of the Rubin Museum, The Ethnographic Museum of Zurich University, and Dr. John M. Lundquist. In addition, we are now able to exhibit items Rock had collected that I had not been able to locate fifteen years ago.

Lijiang has undergone a rapid transformation due to the exacting demands of tourism and other factors. It is unrecognizable from the place I first saw in 1992. But what will become of Dongba cultural heritage?

Quentin Roosevelt's *China: Ancestral Realms of the Naxi* is a celebration of the Naxi, a record of their past. We can thank Quentin Roosevelt and Joseph Rock for capturing Naxi life and culture as they existed decades ago.

P. 7  
(left) The water in Lijiang's canals is so clean that people have washed their clothes and vegetables in them for centuries.

P. 8  
(right) In 1998, the cobblestones of Dayan (大砚镇) were already lined with souvenir shops and cafés.

P. 6 a,b  
Baoshan Stone Village rising between terraced hills and cliffs on all sides.

Numerous people have made this project possible, and to them I owe my deepest gratitude. They include:

Frances Roosevelt for sharing part of her husband's life. I regret that I was not able to realize the project during her lifetime.

Alexandra Roosevelt Dworkin, Dr. Anna C. Roosevelt, and Dr. Susan Roosevelt Weld for their support and trust and for allowing me to rummage through the family's precious belongings.

Christine Mathieu for trusting me, for lending her scholarship, and for sharing my commitment to bringing the Nazi story to the public.

Silvia B. Sutton for her friendship, encouragement, and guidance until her sudden passing. I am grateful to be able to include her article in this volume.

Zhu Boatian, for agreeing to participate in the project. His involvement in the field of Nazi studies extends beyond this book and exhibition.

Dr. Rubie Watson, Genevieve Fisher, and Susan Haskell at the Peabody Museum at Harvard; Wu Tung and Robin Weiss at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Eugene Woo at the Harvard-Yenching Library; Dr. Mi Chu Wiens at the Library of Congress: I thank them all for their assistance and patience.

Ralph Samuelson, Sarah Bradley, and Cecily Cook at the Asian Cultural Council, for their generous grant support.

My father, Mang Hang Ho, for translating Quentin Roosevelt's thesis into Chinese; my mother, Chor Fu Wong Ho, whose prayers kept me safe; and my husband, Paul Kunkel, who made it so much easier to complete the journey.

Yang Yenfen, for agreeing to take me on the detour to Lijiang.

And two men who have since passed away: Atom Constantino for mentioning Lijiang on the Yangzi River cruise, and Dongba He Kaixiang for sharing his art with me.

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## NOTES

- 1 Yunnan, in southwest China, is the last region to be incorporated into the nation. China's sixth largest province, it shares borders with Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam and has the highest number of ethnic nationalities in the country. Its capital, Kunming, is known as the "City of Eternal Spring" (春城) for its temperate climate.
- 2 Perhaps she was a shaman (leebu). When I started to write this essay, I learned from his friends that Atom Constantino was known for his "spontaneous tales."
- 3 Nowadays, the trip from Kunming to Lijiang by plane takes less than an hour. My trip in 1992 was completely pre-planned by tour operators in the U.S. and China. Everywhere I went, I was met by a personal guide and driver. Any change to the fixed, often rigid, itinerary triggered long discussions. Although traveling this way had its merits, I never did it again.
- 4 Zhang Hong, "The Sustainable Development of Tourism in Lijiang," Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, <http://ma.caudillweb.com/documents/bridging/papers/hong.zhang.pdf> (accessed July 9, 2010).
- 5 "Dongba" also refers to the religion of the Naxi people and describes their writing, music, art, and dance.
- 6 Sadly, this division is now closed and the Naxi material is no longer readily accessible.
- 7 Rock devoted most of his life (from 1922 to 1948) to researching and documenting Naxi religion, culture, history, and language. He produced numerous works, including the first Naxi-English dictionary. Rock's writings also inspired Ezra Pound who, while confined in a mental institution during his last few years, found solace in writing beautiful cantos about Lijiang.
- 8 Anthony Jackson, "Naxi Studies: Past, Present and Future," in *Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups in China*, New Asia Academic Bulletin 8, ed. Chien Chiao and Nicholas Tapp (Hong Kong: New Asia College, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1989).
- 9 Quentin Roosevelt, "In the Land of the Devil Priests," *Natural History* 45 (April 1940): 197–209.
- 10 "Buddhism: Study of its History Takes Another Roosevelt to Tibet," *Life*, January 8, 1940.
- 11 These are included in the exhibition.
- 12 Frances Webb Roosevelt was an accomplished artist, especially of portraits.
- 13 Quentin Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study of the Naxi People" (honors thesis, Harvard College, 1941). Roosevelt made two typewritten copies of his thesis, with his photographs inserted. I refer to the copy donated to the New York Public Library in 1995. The only other copy can be found at Harvard University.
- 14 His research partner, according to *Life* magazine, was the Asian historian Schuyler Cammann. A student of the Central Asian scholar Owen Lattimore, Cammann was pursuing his master degree at Harvard while Roosevelt was an undergraduate. Langdon Warner, the Central Asian art scholar, was Roosevelt's teacher and adviser.
- 15 S. B. Sutton, *In China's Border Provinces: The Turbulent Career of Joseph Rock, Botanist-Explorer* (New York: Hastings House, 1974).
- 16 The twelve-hour trip I took then now takes four hours by car from Lijiang.
- 17 These had been in private collections but are on view in the exhibition.
- 18 More than half of the 3,342 Naxi manuscripts at the Library of Congress were collected by Joseph Rock. Of the 598 manuscripts at Harvard-Yenching Library, eighty-eight were collected by Roosevelt and the rest by Rock.
- 19 The digitization of these manuscripts has made producing this current exhibition much more feasible.

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# Acknowledgments

Christine Mathieu (蓝诗田)

People who make extraordinary things happen have a passionate interest and unshakable dedication. I wish to honor the memory of Quentin Roosevelt, who at the age of nineteen traveled to the remote and dangerous mountains of southwestern China to gather this extraordinary collection of Naxi religious art. To him we owe this first-ever exhibition.

I also wish to honor the memory of Joseph Rock, one of the great scholars in Himalayan studies, whose work on the Naxi religion remains unmatched. I encountered Rock's work in 1988 when I opened my first book on the Naxi. He has never left me since. In September this year, I stood in the study of the house in which he lived in the village of Yuhu. On the wall there was a reproduction of a well-known photograph, taken by Rock when he lived in this room. It showed his folding work-table (so often photographed), his chair, bed, bookshelves, and clock, which were all still in the same place. The books, the rug, and photographic proofs seen in the photograph are long gone. There is a feeling of absence, and the room is much smaller than I had imagined. But it is Luo Ke Boshi room, as Dr. Rock is remembered in Lijiang.

To my colleague Cindy Ho goes my warmest gratitude. I thank her for her passion for Naxi Dongba art, for her discovery of Quentin Roosevelt's collection, and her enthusiasm to turn it into an exhibition, and for our own collaboration begun nearly fifteen years ago. This exhibition would never have happened without her.

And of course this exhibition would never have happened without the interest, the support, the work, and the dedication of our patrons, lenders, colleagues, and friends. Cindy and I are deeply grateful to the Rubin Museum of Art for bringing to the public these precious and unique objects and the remarkable stories that accompany the Naxi, their Dongba art, Quentin Roosevelt, and Joseph Rock. In particular, I warmly thank Martin Brauen, who had been planning a project based on Naxi art and invited Cindy and me to work with him as co-curators and co-editors and authors of the book. I also want to thank Helen Abbott for her efforts and knowledge, and especially for her willingness to work with me across several time zones.

All the people on staff at the museum deserve our warmest appreciation for their contribution to the book, and in particular, Deanna Lee for her undaunted and precise editorial work. The exhibition itself required the dedicated work of the entire staff, and I know that John Monaco and Martin Brauen spent many hours with Cindy to find the best way to present the many and varied artifacts to be shown. Other museum staff who must be gratefully acknowledged include Kavie Barnes, Michelle Bennett, Andrew Buttermilch, Amy Bzdak, Helen Chen, Marilena Christodoulou, Karl Debreczeny, Dawn Eshelman, Alisha Ferrin, Tracey Friedman, Cate Griffin, Zachary Harper, Haley Hughes, Jonathan Kuhr, Ashley Mask, Alexis McCormack, Tim McHenry, Shane Murray, Anne-Marie Nolin, Andrea Pemberton, Alanna Schindewolf, Patrick Sears, Marcos Stafne, Hana Tahirovic, and David Wilburn.

The lenders to the exhibition have our gratitude for the loan of the marvelous and rare objects in their collections. We thank Alexandra Roosevelt Dworkin, Dr. Anna C.

Roosevelt, and Dr. Susan Roosevelt Weld for lending the precious objects from their father's collection and for sharing family treasures, including Quentin Roosevelt's letters and the public and private documents relating to his adventure among the Naxi. We thank the Harvard-Yenching Library, the Library of Congress, the Ethnographic Museum of Zurich, the New York Public Library and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology for the loans from their unique collections and also for their role in preserving Dongba culture. When the name Naxi was unknown, these institutions had the inspiration to acquire the manuscripts and artworks that Quentin Roosevelt and Joseph Rock had brought back from China.

We are grateful to more recent collectors who have lent their precious objects for their interest and appreciation of traditional Dongba art: John Lundquist, Shelley and Donald Rubin, and the collectors who wish to remain anonymous.

A few people who are not directly involved in this exhibition deserve my personal gratitude: my family—my husband, Ari, my son, Euro, and his wife, Sacha, my daughter, Cassis, and her husband, Harley, and my little grandchildren, Felix, Freyer, and Hester, for their understanding and patience; and other colleagues and friends: Jean-Michel Roynard of Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques (CNRS-LACITO) in Paris for creating the wonderful map of northwestern Yunnan, David Templeman of Monash University in Australia for the informative discussions and help with Tibetan iconography, and Xixi (who occasionally goes by the real name of Yao Jieqian) for her assistance with aspects of translation.

I wish to thank all the scholars who have so generously contributed essays to this book: Martin Brauen, Guo Dalie, He Limin, He Zhonghua, Lamu Gatusa, Alexis Michaud, Yang Fuquan. He Limin has all of my gratitude for the extraordinary personal contribution he made to this project. Twelve years ago he shared his extensive knowledge and experience of Dongba religion assisting me in identifying the objects in the Roosevelt collection. When I returned to Lijiang in 2010, he once again generously gave his time. I also wish to give special thanks to Alexis Michaud and Yang Fuquan for all the assistance they provided beyond their written contributions to the book and to Lamu Gatusa for years of collaboration and priceless memories of trekking on narrow mountain passes. I thank Guo Dalie and He Zhonghua for teaching me in 1990 and Alexis Michaud, Lamu Gatusa, He Limin, and Yang Fuquan for the wonderful times we shared in China in 2009 and 2010 and for putting up with all of my questions. I sincerely thank all of the contributing scholars for being my teachers and for becoming my friends.

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# Introduction

Christine Mathieu (蓝诗田)

I.1

The founder of the Dongba religion, Dongba Shilo, sits in the 18th Heaven. His body is green. Below him is a swastika (yidua), turning clockwise in the Buddhist manner.

Detail of funeral scroll  
(Cat. No. 29)  
Courtesy of Harvard-Yenching  
Library, Harvard University  
FHCL: 3322112



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Quentin Roosevelt first learned of the Naxi people and encountered their extraordinary religious art in his family home in Oyster Bay, New York. In 1928 Quentin's father and uncle, Theodore and Kermit Roosevelt, had undertaken a zoological expedition to the Sino-Tibetan borderland, sponsored by the Field Museum. In addition to prized specimen collections, they had returned with ancient Naxi artifacts, scrolls, and manuscripts written in an unknown pictographic script. All were given to various museums except one funeral scroll that remained in the family's possession: a depiction of a soul's journey through hell and heaven, painted on a remarkable piece of cloth forty feet in length and eight inches in width.

When Roosevelt was a student in art history at Harvard, he became fascinated with this mysterious scroll, which his parents offered to him for Christmas. In her memoir, *Day Before Yesterday*, his mother, Eleanor Butler Alexander-Roosevelt, recalled that Quentin arrived home for Christmas at Oyster Bay eager to discuss his desire to go to Lijiang to look for more Naxi scrolls and manuscripts. He had spoken to several museum administrators who expressed interest in the Naxi and offered to help finance the trip. In addition, Harvard had given him permission for the trip and to use his findings in support of his thesis on fine arts.

In her prologue in this book, Cindy Ho relates her own discovery of Naxi culture and how it led her to Quentin Roosevelt's research and collecting, which then led to the current publication and related exhibition. And in his essay, Martin Brauen discusses Roosevelt's trip and the extraordinary materials and information he collected in Lijiang. Thus "Quentin Roosevelt's China" has brought us together to introduce to and share with the public the traditions and art of the Naxi and their unique Dongba religion.

# The Naxi

The Naxi live around the loop of the Jinshajiang, as the Yangzi River is known in that region. They are classed as a minority nationality, one of fifty-six official national groups that make up the Chinese nation, among which the Han majority accounts for ninety-one percent of the total population. Prior to 1949 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the Naxi were known as Na-khi and Na-shi. For centuries, however, the Chinese historical record referred to the Naxi as Mo-so, after a tribal people who settled in the Lijiang plain during the tenth or the eleventh century. The modern Naxi nationality comprises two groups: the Naxi, who number about 290,000 (240,000 of whom live in and around Lijiang town), and the Mosuo, who number about 30,000. Their capital is Yongning and their territory, which includes the lake Lugu, spreads into Sichuan. After petitioning the government in the early 1990s, the people of Yongning were granted the official title of "Mosuo people, a branch of the Naxi nationality." Throughout this book, therefore, the name Naxi will refer specifically to the people of Lijiang, and the name Mosuo (pronounced "mo-so") to the people of Yongning.

Both the Naxi and Mosuo have gained worldwide attention on account of extraordinary cultural features. The Naxi have become famous for their Dongba religion and its unique pictographic script, and the Mosuo are renowned for their matrilineal organization and for being the only people in the world to have instituted a formal system of "non-marriage."<sup>1</sup> The Mosuo also have an indigenous religious tradition called Daba, which overlaps with the Naxi Dongba, but they have no manuscripts and their tradition is entirely oral. The exhibition Quentin Roosevelt's China: Ancestral Realms of the Naxi and the present volume are dedicated to the Naxi Dongba tradition, but since many scholars believe that the Mosuo Daba is an older form of the Naxi Dongba, we have included an article on Mosuo religion by the Mosuo academician and poet Lamu Gatusa.

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## Naxi history

Collectively, the Naxi and Mosuo are speakers of related dialects called Na, and their ethnic relationship can only be understood through historical development. The Naxi and Mosuo trace their origins to ancient tribes, not least to the ancient Naxi kingdom founded by Kublai Khan during the Mongol conquest of the thirteenth century. During the Ming dynasty, in the fifteenth century, the territories of Lijiang and Yongning were divided into two distinct feudal domains, and from this time onward, the people on each side of the Yangzi followed their own destinies. The Lijiang Naxi were strongly influenced by Chinese modes of civilization while the Yongning Mosuo fell under the Tibetan sphere of influence.

Between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries, Lijiang was the commercial and cultural center of a relatively large kingdom. At the height of its power, the Naxi kingdom spread northward along the Sino-Tibetan border, with its northernmost point about forty miles south of present-day Litang. The Naxi kings carried the family name of Mu, and they were descendants of a tribal chief established by Kublai Khan. The Naxi kingdom was a manorial system where serfs tilled the soil while freemen—who included indigenous tribal people as well as large numbers of immigrant Chinese—paid taxes and provided soldiers for conscription. The Mu kings were loyal vassals of the Chinese empire and prided themselves on their civilization. Along with the Chinese peasant-soldiers, artists, craftsmen, and scholars, the Mu kings welcomed the Chinese religions—including Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—and Chinese arts and letters. The Naxi kings supported temple con-



struction and the development of the arts, mural paintings, architecture, gardens, poetry, and music. In the late sixteenth century, as the Mu kings expanded their territory farther into Tibet, they added Tibetan Buddhism to their religious and artistic interests and eventually converted to Karmapa Buddhism.

The feudal system ended in Lijiang in 1723, when the Qing emperor removed the Naxi kings from office and instituted Chinese magistrates in their place. Serfdom was abolished, and the Naxi adopted Chinese marriage and funeral rituals. Naxi women swapped their long pleated skirts for Chinese-style trousers. In Yongning, the feudal system endured until 1956, when the People's Liberation Army brought Communist reforms to the region.

## The Naxi religion

The Naxi religion, which is known as Dongba, is a collection of syncretic practices. Some have ancient roots in indigenous shamanism and animism, and others appear to be more recent imports from the religions of Tibet and China: Bon, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, popular cults, and Mongolian shamanism. The Dongba corpus comprises about one thousand ceremonies and sub-ceremonies, contained in the famous pictographic manuscripts.

To the present day, very few scholars have studied the Dongba religion: prior to the Communist revolution, Lijiang was remote and extremely difficult to access, and after the revolution, Dongba ceremonies were proscribed for forty years. Lijiang was closed to foreign nationals until 1985 and the mountain regions were closed until the mid- to late 1990s. The first scholar to have paid attention to the Naxi was the French Tibetologist Jacques Bacot, who traveled through Lijiang in 1912. Although Bacot collected some manuscripts, he was concerned with the local history rather than religion. In the 1940s, the Chinese art historian Li Lincan, who had taken refuge in Lijiang from the war-ravaged Chinese interior, became fascinated by Dongba culture. Li recorded and translated several Dongba manuscripts, produced a pictographic dictionary, and translated Dongba ritual books. The Naxi-born historian Fang Guoyu also began documenting Naxi religion before the revolution, but his pictographic dictionary was co-published after the revolution with the Naxi scholar He Zhiwu, the son of a Dongba priest.

## Joseph F. Rock

Prior to the Communist revolution, the field of Naxi studies was not so much dominated as almost entirely occupied by Joseph F. Rock. Rock had first traveled to Yunnan as a botanist-explorer, but he developed a passion for the Naxi and their culture, and he remained in Lijiang for twenty-seven years. Rock is undoubtedly one of the most colorful, cantankerous, brilliant, and legendary characters of the Sino-Tibetan borderland. We have included in this volume an essay by the late S. B. Sutton, Rock's biographer.

Joseph Rock transcribed, translated, documented, and photographed Dongba manuscripts and ceremonies; he produced an astonishing compilation and translation of all the historical documents pertaining to Lijiang and a remarkably detailed and as yet unrivaled encyclopedic pictographic dictionary, published by Instituto Italiano per Il Medio ed Estremo Oriente under the auspices of Giuseppe Tucci, one of the giants of Tibetan studies. The first volume was published in 1963, after Rock's death; the second was compiled from his notes and produced in 1972 with the assistance of Mrs. Lester Marks, who had collaborated with Rock on the first volume. This second volume contains the most precious of all documentation available today on Naxi religion, for it is an encyclopedic record of hun-

dreds of gods, goddesses, demigods, and demons contained in the Dongba corpus, which are the elements of Dongba knowledge most vulnerable to time and neglect. Rock was able to gather this invaluable information through the careful comparison of hundreds of texts and the collaboration of several of the most knowledgeable Dongba priests in Lijiang, especially He Huading and He Zuowei.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of this extraordinary work, Rock made an ambitious claim for the Dongba: that the ancient Naxi religion had preserved an earlier and purer form of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion of Tibet.

## Dongba art and Dongba art collections

Dongba art includes paintings on small cards, cloth banners, wooden slats, funeral scrolls and thangkas. Art and calligraphy are vital aspects of the Dongba religion. They are the tangible representation of its visions and its very existence. As such, some forms of Dongba art serve exclusive religious functions and are specifically associated with certain realms of Dongba cosmology—the realms of nature, gods, demons, priests, and people. Thus, manuscripts concentrate the power of the priest in the ritual domain, thangkas are “living” representations of the higher gods, most of whom are in the heavenly realm, and kobiu (painted slats that are inserted into the ground) are the artistic medium associated with the world of nature. The six realms of existence are represented on the funeral scrolls that so intrigued Quentin Roosevelt. Not surprisingly, Dongba priests were greatly appreciated and renowned for their artistic and calligraphic abilities, and the more influential artist-priests established distinct styles or schools, which inspired their disciples. The priests were also dancers and performers. But Dongba dance, drumming, art, and calligraphy were never practiced for their own sake. No religious painting or artifact was ever hung on a wall as decoration.

The first Dongba manuscript to make its way to Europe was collected by the French missionary Père Desgodins in 1867. Four decades later, Bacot brought several books back with him to Paris. In the 1920s the Dutch missionary Miss E. Scharten and the Scottish explorer and plant collector George Forrest also sent some manuscripts to European museums. In the 1940s, Li Lincan collected more than one thousand manuscripts, several hundred of which he donated to Nanjing University and the remainder to the Central Museum in Taipei.<sup>3</sup> Quentin Roosevelt collected more than two thousand manuscripts. Joseph Rock collected about three thousand—1,300 of which were sold to the Library of Congress, others were sold or given to private collectors, and another 1,118 were bequeathed to the library at the University of Marburg and later transferred to the State Library in Berlin.<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, Quentin Roosevelt, who seemed to have met everyone there was to know in southwestern China in 1939 (he even ran into General Claire Chennault at the bank in Kunming), never met Joseph Rock. Rock was not in Lijiang at the time of Roosevelt's visit, and it appears that he did not respond to Roosevelt's attempt at correspondence. Rock, who was renowned for his difficult temperament, may have felt possessive of this territory.<sup>5</sup> Or he may have disapproved of James Andrews's role in Roosevelt's project, as he held especially negative views of the missionary's activities among the Naxi.<sup>6</sup>

## The Dongba religion since the Communist revolution

After the Communist revolution, Dongba practices were proscribed and the Dongba priests were vilified. Yet, in 1962, the local Party secretary Xu Zhenkang collected five thousand Dongba manuscripts for museum preservation and initiated an ambitious project to record

and translate the entire Dongba corpus. This work, however, was brutally interrupted during the violent decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). When Deng Xiaoping returned China to social normalcy, traditional customs, alongside a degree of individualism and creative thinking, slowly reemerged all over China. Ethnic regions regained a sizable measure of administrative autonomy. In 1985 foreign scholars and travelers were allowed to return to the region of the Lijiang plain, but the more remote mountain areas would remain closed for another decade. Naxi scholars and the old priests also returned to the translation project. By then, however, their work was a race against time. The Dongba corpus was vast, and there were still thousands of hours of ritual texts to be recorded, transcribed, and translated. The Dongba priests were very old and their knowledge would die with the last of them.

By the end of the 1980s, anyone who had any knowledge at all of Dongba tradition—scholars, travelers, Naxi, Chinese, and foreigners—regarded the inevitable fate awaiting the old Naxi tradition as an irreparable loss. All were convinced that the Dongba religion represented a priceless heritage that the Naxi had no reason to shun and even less reason to bury. Then, slowly, the Dongba priests began to train young acolytes in the more remote mountain areas. In less than a decade, propelled by the forces of liberalization, globalization, tourism, and commercialization, the Dongba tradition had begun its present renaissance.

Today, no visitor to Lijiang can miss the place of the Dongba tradition in Naxi culture or its significance to Naxi cultural identity. Dongba culture, heritage, entertainment, art, pictographs, music, and dancing are everywhere in evidence in contemporary Lijiang. Dongba mythology inspires literature, design, and the visual arts, and the ancient pictographs adorn the signs above tailor shops and restaurants. The ubiquity of Dongba culture makes it difficult to imagine that less than two decades ago this extraordinary tradition had been destined to become extinct. Evidently, the commodified Dongba tradition now found in Lijiang differs substantially from that encountered by Quentin Roosevelt and that Joseph Rock worked to rescue for posterity. But where purists may balk, anthropologists find interesting continuations. In some respects, commercialization could be seen as the latest of several ideological regimes that have shaped and transformed the old Naxi tradition across centuries of history. On a truer spiritual plane, however, it is important to note that the Dongba rituals that are once again performed in Lijiang should be the rituals dedicated to heaven and the spirits of nature—ceremonies that today may be categorized as ceremonies of caring for the environment.<sup>7</sup>

## The Roosevelt Legacy

In July 1949, when a local branch of the Chinese Communist Party declared a revolutionary government in Lijiang, religious activities ceased overnight. The Dongba priests, Rock wrote, immediately dissociated themselves from their former offices, for fear of retribution.<sup>8</sup> Peter Goullart, a Russian exile from the Soviet revolution and a contemporary of Rock in Lijiang, recalled the events in his book, *Forgotten Kingdom*:

The dtombas [sic] were proscribed and many of them lived in fear of their lives, expecting to be arrested any moment and executed. The lamaseries were desecrated, images and precious tankas burned or smashed, sutras destroyed and lamas either arrested or scattered. ... Lenin's dictum "Religion is the opium of the masses" was probably more zealously enforced in Likiang than it had been in Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Rock and Goullart left China shortly after the Communist takeover. Rock died in 1962, the year Xu Zhenkang initiated the Dongba translation project and just before the first volume

of his dictionary was published. A witness to the excesses of the revolutionaries and exiled from his beloved Lijiang, Rock was convinced that his work was all that would remain of the Dongba tradition. The Cultural Revolution almost proved him right. When the Red Guards went on the rampage, searching for religious artifacts to burn and old priests to beat, the Dongba priests divested themselves of whatever manuscripts, paintings, or other objects that may still have been in their possession. Sometimes they buried their treasures, and years later, when the situation was safe, they had forgotten where.

Meanwhile, in the decades that followed the Chinese Communist revolution, the West forgot about the Naxi. Notwithstanding Professor Giuseppe Tucci's dedication, Rock's work went largely unread. When I first requested a loan of his *The Na-khi Naga Cult and Related Ceremonies* from the library at the Australian National University, I had to cut the pages of both volumes. This was in 1990, thirty-eight years after their publication.

The world also forgot about Quentin Roosevelt's wartime expedition to southwestern China and his remarkable collection—until 1992, when Cindy Ho traveled from New York City to Lijiang and became fascinated with the Naxi and their pictographic script and came across the name "Roosevelt."

In 1939 Quentin Roosevelt's collection was extraordinary. In the 1940s, when Joseph Rock lost most of his collection to Japanese torpedoes, the Roosevelt collection became the most complete collection of Naxi religious art outside China. Today it remains so. It is impossible to estimate the loss of material culture that occurred in Lijiang during the years of political extremism. Indicating the scale of the destruction were the expressions of surprise, interest, and emotion from Professor Zhu Baotian of the Yunnan Museum in Kunming and Dongba He Limin of the Dongba Research Institute in Lijiang when, in the mid-1990s, they were presented with photographs of the objects in the Roosevelt collection. While at times they were critical of the earlier priests' skills, they were often astonished at the antiquity of many of the objects, at their contents, and at the aesthetic standards that they had never seen in Lijiang.

Quentin Roosevelt's *China: Ancestral Realms of the Naxi* gathers the best and most representative objects in the Roosevelt collection for its first public exhibition. To these objects, the curators have added manuscripts and paintings from Joseph Rock's collection, which are likewise exhibited for the first time. This event is both a remarkable opportunity to show Naxi religious art as it could still be found in the years before the Communist revolution and to offer a tribute to two extraordinary men: Quentin Roosevelt and Joseph Rock.

#### NOTES

- 1 See Shih Chuan-kang, "The Moso: Sexual Union, Household Organization, Ethnicity and Gender in a Matrilineal Duolocal Society in Southwest China" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1993); Cai Hua, *The Na: A Society without Fathers or Husbands* (London: Zone Books, 2000); Christine Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study of the Ancient Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland: Naxi and Mosuo* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003).
- 2 Joseph F. Rock, *The Na-khi Naga Cult and Related Ceremonies* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1952), 2: 6.
- 3 Anthony Jackson, "Naxi Studies, Past, Present and Future," in *Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups in China*, New Asia Academic Bulletin 8, ed. Chien Chao and Nicholas Tapp (Hong Kong: New Asia College, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1989).
- 4 Anthony Jackson, "Naxi Studies, Past, Present and Future."
- 5 In this volume, refer to the essay by Martin Brauen for Andrews's take on Rock's collecting activities.
- 6 S. B. Sutton, *In China's Border Provinces: The Turbulent Career of Joseph Rock, Botanist-Explorer* (New York: Hastings House, 1974), 216.
- 7 In this volume, see my interview with Yang Fuquan, a scholar of Naxi origins at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, for his thoughts on the fate of the Dongba and the effect of tourism on cultural preservation and heritage.
- 8 Joseph F. Rock, *The Zhima Funeral Ceremony of the Na-khi of Southwestern China*, Studia Instituti Anthropos 9 (Vienna-Modling: St. Gabriel's Mission Press, 1955), x.
- 9 Peter Goullart, *Forgotten Kingdom* (London: John Murray, 1957), 254.



## CHAPTER 1

# A Memorable Journey to the Naxi: Quentin Roosevelt's Legacy

Martin Brauen with assistance from Tania O'Connor



1.1  
Quentin Roosevelt.

All images in this chapter are courtesy of the daughters of Quentin Roosevelt. Quotation marks in captions indicate that they were written by Quentin Roosevelt.

In the spring of 1939, at age nineteen, Quentin Roosevelt (1919–1948) undertook a four-month expedition deep into China's southwestern territory. A Harvard undergraduate, Roosevelt was determined to see the region's little-known Naxi people firsthand and bring back many artifacts for U.S. museums that he wanted to study in greater detail upon his return to Harvard. The grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt and the son of Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Quentin hailed from a very prominent family. He was first introduced to the Naxi through several manuscripts and scrolls from his father's and uncle Kermit's 1928 expedition to southwestern China. Fascinated by the unique pictographic script, Roosevelt made these religious relics the focus of his Fine Arts honors thesis. His mother, Eleanor Butler Alexander-Roosevelt, wrote about her son's growing interest in the material collected by her husband and Quentin's uncle Kermit:

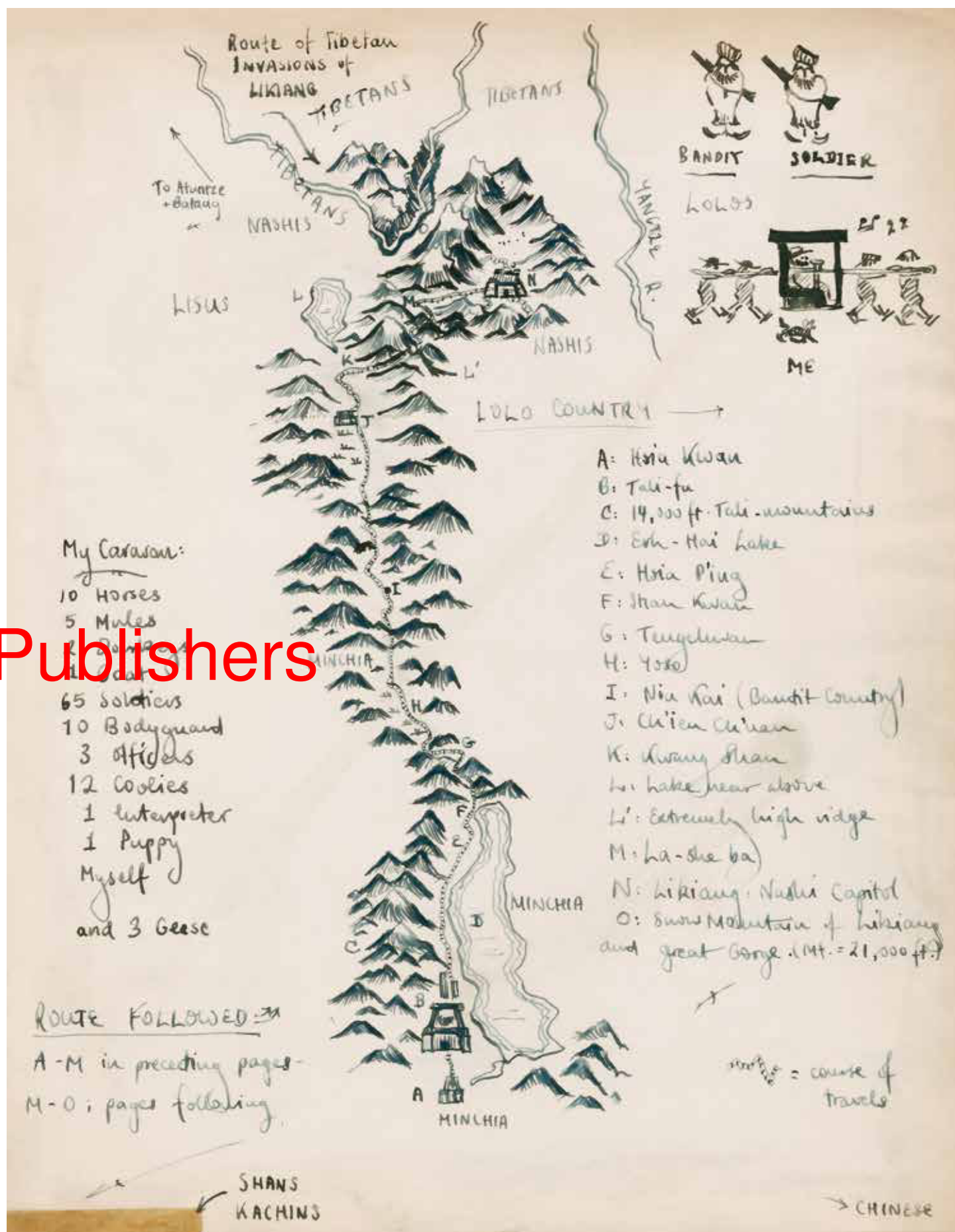
After the second of Ted's Asian expeditions some years before, he had brought back a number of Naxi manuscripts and paintings he had found at Likiang in southwest China, near the border of Tibet and Burma. These he had given to various museums, with the exception of an ancient scroll forty feet long by eight inches wide with scenes and figures painted on cloth. It had been crudely repaired on the back with scraps of paper covered with Naxi pictograph writing. We decided we could not display it in our house and offered it to a museum in New York. The curator didn't want it, saying it was out of their line, besides being in bad condition and of unknown origin. Quentin, at the time a sophomore at Harvard, became interested in the scroll, so we gave it to him at Christmas.

A month later he arrived at Oyster Bay late one night with something important to discuss. A scholar in Boston had placed his scroll in the twelfth century and told him such a thing was so rare as to be fabulous. Quentin wanted to go to Likiang and search for more Naxi scrolls and manuscripts. He had been to several museums, some of whose curators had never even heard of the Naxis, but all had expressed interest and had agreed to help finance his expedition if it was successful.<sup>1</sup>

Roosevelt planned his travel well beforehand. He wrote to the Reverend James H. Andrews of the Pentecostal Missionary Union in Lijiang, an old friend of his father:

As you know, my father collected some Naxi books and one scroll ... I have been studying these manuscripts with great interest along with two very fine scrolls which you sent out later on. ... Many of the museums in Boston and New York, in fact all those I have visited, have been immensely interested in the manuscripts, and none of them has ever seen anything of the same type or even from the same people. Recently I have become increasingly anxious to visit Lichiang and the surrounding country and collect more Naxi material and make studies of the people. The Peabody Museum of Anthropology at Harvard and also the Yenching Institute have tentatively agreed to

1.2  
A sketch by Roosevelt showing the route of his 1939 expedition in China and his caravan's inventory.



help finance a trip to Yunnan next summer ... I am also anxious to know what villages are the best for getting the manuscripts, especially the scrolls, and how readily the priests would part with them. ... Incidentally, I would like to make sure whether it would be possible to get enough scrolls and books to make it worth while for the Museum to send me.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the work of the botanist and explorer Joseph Rock (1884–1962), the Naxi were virtually unstudied at the time and largely unknown in the West. In an article published in *Natural History* magazine in April 1940, Roosevelt claimed that only two institutions housed Naxi pictographic manuscripts: the Fogg Museum at Harvard and the Library of Congress in Washington. The extreme rarity and uniqueness of these objects led several museums, among them the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, to sponsor his expedition in the expectation of collecting such artifacts.<sup>3</sup> The Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University showed its interest “in a representative collection from one or more groups, giving us every day objects used in their day to day life. ... Particularly do we wish the tools with which the various peoples make their material culture. ... We are not as much interested in single articles from many places.”<sup>4</sup> The museum paid Quentin Roosevelt one hundred dollars in advance to assist him in securing ethnological specimens for the museum during his protracted stay in southwestern China. After securing a semester’s leave of absence and agreeing to requirement-fulfilling summer classes, Roosevelt packed his bags and set off from Seattle on March 4, 1939, aboard the *Empress of Asia*, heading toward Japan.

## Adventure: In the footsteps of his forefathers

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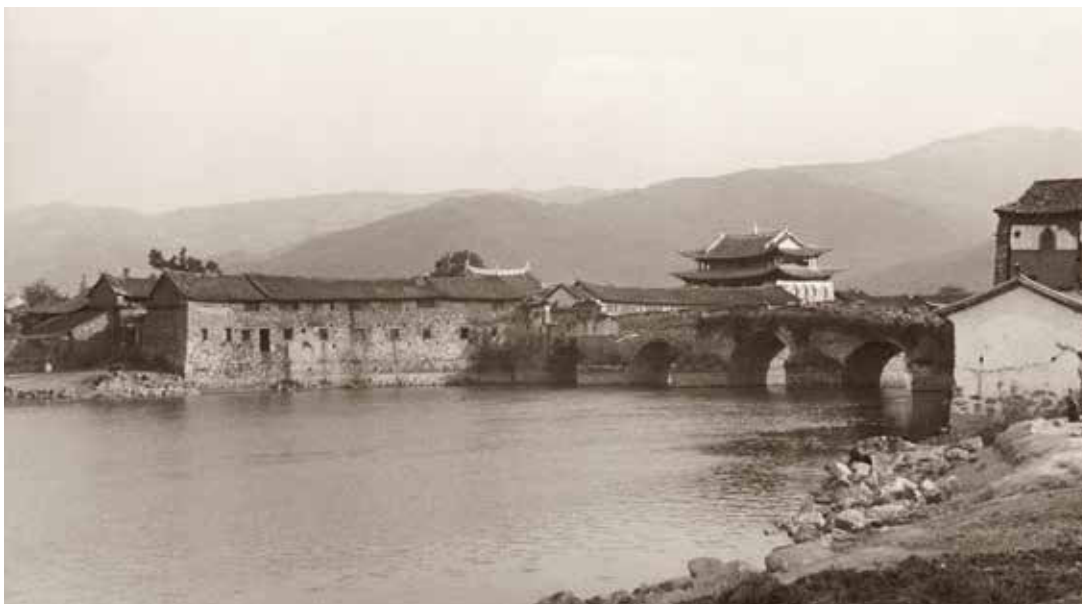
At the time of Roosevelt’s journey, China was still suffering from the Japanese invasion in the summer of 1937. Despite the danger, he was determined to go on the trip; he seemed to have inherited his grandfather’s enthusiasm for wartime adventures. His first encounter with the Japanese army had occurred two years earlier while he traveled in China with his mother. After escaping the bombing of Shanghai’s harbor in August 1937, they ended up as refugees in Manila. But the experience hardly dissuaded him from jumping headfirst into another war-torn region. Less than a week before his departure, Roosevelt obtained special permission from the U.S. government to travel to China, which omitted the general Chinese travel restrictions. But Roosevelt was advised that this endorsement was based on the understanding that he would “confine his travel in China to necessary travel to Shanghai, Peiping, Tientsin or Tsingtao and that he will not proceed elsewhere in China without first consulting the American diplomatic or consular officer in charge.”<sup>5</sup>

Family connections, letters of introduction, and gifts smoothed Roosevelt’s journey. But, far from relying on these, he frequently made his own inroads on the strength of his charisma, courage, and determination. Bored with the monotony of life on the *Empress of Asia*, Roosevelt disembarked at Yokohama, determined to try his luck by plane. Befriending a series of Japanese military officers and the manager of the Fukuoka airport, Roosevelt obtained rare permission (and paid twenty-four dollars) to fly from Fukuoka to a Japanese airbase close to Shanghai in the prohibited and fortified zone of the Imperial Japanese Army. Securing a seat on a flight that was supposedly full, he found himself flying alongside Imperial officers into a Japanese army base. He later stated in an interview with a Japanese journalist that he knew nothing about the war, “which is what I said, but it looked a little

odd, as if in 1916 I had gone on an expedition to the Rhine valley and said the same. I always stay on the safe side, however, and comment on the speed and comfort of Japanese trains if they try to lead me into the war. I'm always very vague on political angles."<sup>6</sup>

During a stopover in Hong Kong, Roosevelt dined with an elite circle of expatriates, including the British Governor-General, Sir Geoffry, and his wife, Lady Northcote. He was escorted around the island by William Henry Donald, the famous Australian adviser to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and a family friend. Donald's connections secured Roosevelt a private visit with May-ling Soong, the wife of Chiang Kai-shek, and her sister Ai-ling Soong, the wife of H. H. Kung, Premier of the Republic of China and Chairman of the Executive Yuan, who were said to not entertain anyone else in Hong Kong at the time.<sup>7</sup> Roosevelt's favorable reception in China may reveal how eager the Chinese were for assistance from the United States. Later, the Southwest Transportation Company, run by Madame Chiang Kai-shek's brother, T. L. Soong, furnished him a private car and interpreter free of charge for his journey along the Burma Road to Dali. Proud of his own resourcefulness, Roosevelt wrote to his mother, "By the way, don't you think I've done pretty well so far on this trip? There wasn't anybody of any importance in Hong Kong that I didn't see and if possible get help from." On March 26, he took the coastal steamer SS Laos from Hong Kong to Haiphong and continued via narrow-gauge railway past Hanoi to Yunnanfu (now Kunming), where he stayed at the American consulate.

More than a mere art-collecting expedition, Roosevelt's journey also included a diplomatic dimension that certainly brought him the sympathies of the Chinese Nationalists, who hoped he would report on their situation to the American president. An R.O.T.C. officer at Harvard and set for commission as a second lieutenant upon graduating in 1941, Roosevelt was closely attuned to the political and military situation in the Far East and met with several high-ranking military officers, government leaders, and foreign diplomats on his trip. His travel diary, in which some pages are stamped with the words "For American Eyes Only" is filled with notes from these conversations, diagrams of army bases, detailed maps, military flight timetables, political intelligence flowcharts, Chinese and Japanese military and political rankings, ammunition statistics, field project descriptions, and army movement updates. An aviation enthusiast, Roosevelt was particularly interested in Chinese and Japanese air maneuvers, aerial battles, warplanes, and flight routes.<sup>8</sup>



1.3  
"Hsia Kwan on Tali Lake."



From Kunming, Roosevelt flew to Chongqing, the wartime capital during the Second Sino-Japanese War (July 1937–September 1945), for necessary travel permits and letters of introduction. The flight had to be postponed twice because of severe air attacks by the Japanese. In Chongqing, Roosevelt was invited to lunch by H. H. Kung, who promised him safe passage through the restricted Yunnan regions. Roosevelt received a special offer from William L. Bond, the director of the China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC), to fly to the northwestern city of Lanzhou, the site of one of the largest and most important air bases in China, to deliver eight million dollars to the Chinese guerilla armies in the north.<sup>9</sup> To reach the secluded base, they would fly directly over the huge mountain range of Amnye Machen, at that time known as one of the highest in the world. With Dr. Kung's permission and a special visa, Roosevelt boarded a plane of the Military Aviation Commission. The plane made a stopover in Chengdu, where he bought rare golden monkey, panda, and snow leopard skins, bronze vessels, and Tibetan manuscripts.



1.4  
"North Gate, Tali."

1.5  
"An Da tui Chiang Takin-  
Hunting Party."



In Lanzhou, Roosevelt was greeted by the provincial officials and invited to stay at the government headquarters, a former Ming imperial palace. The next day, he toured the city and the airfield, taking meticulous notes in his journal. He claimed that, other than a few Russians, only one other foreigner had been allowed to enter the base during the war. Though no account is found in any of his letters and notes, it seems he also made a short trip to the two large Tibetan monasteries in the region, to Kumbum and possibly Labrang, as his photographic archive contains some photographs of these two monasteries.<sup>10</sup> Returning to Kunming from Lanzhou, Roosevelt found his onward air transit grounded due to a bombing attack on one of the airline's planes. Fortunately, William Bond's help secured Roosevelt, disguised as a steward, a spot on one of the rare CNAC flights.

1.6  
"May 4, Loading up in Tali."

1.7  
"On Tengchwan Pass."

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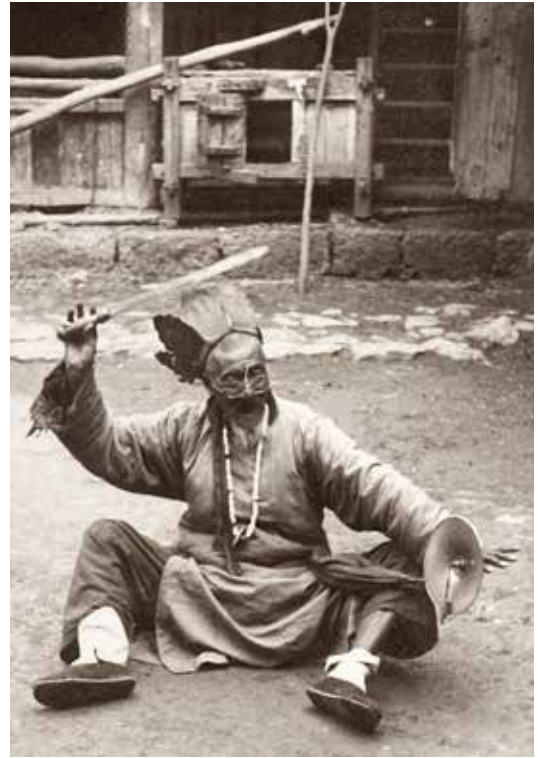


1.8  
"Dragon Lake and Temple, Likiang, with Snow Mountain in Background (21,000 ft) (arr. May 9—4:00 and stayed until May 18)."

1.9  
"Old Dtomba south of  
Likiang, wearing crown and  
demonstrating cymbal."



1.10  
"The Devil Sorcerers or  
Dtombas of Likiang."



Back in Kunming at the end of April, Roosevelt was pleasantly surprised to find himself well received by the many contacts his father made nearly a decade earlier. Once again, Roosevelt's family connections and affability enabled him to travel as comfortably and efficiently as the inhospitable region allowed. Arriving in Dali in a new Buick lent by Mrs. Chiang Kai-shek's brother, he won the favor of a notoriously anti-foreign magistrate. A letter to his mother describes the situation: "The magistrate was supposed to be anti-foreign, and had made much trouble for foreigners going through. But apparently all my impressive letters of introduction, etc., and the General, and also the fact that he had met father years ago at a place called Fuming near Yunnanfu (Kunming), all this made him be extremely nice." Outfitted with a mule and saddle, Roosevelt set off the next morning with the warlord and about forty soldiers and General Sze Hwa, the garrison commander for the northwestern frontier of Yunnan Province, to whom Roosevelt was introduced by the biggest banker in Yunnan. The terrain was hazardous, filled with rocky pinnacles and dangerous bandits. As a precaution against attacks, the caravan was joined by additional troops patrolling the area and continued its journey with two hundred horses, twenty sedan chairs, and hundreds of coolies in tow. Half of the time, Roosevelt was traveling in the general's magnificent sedan chair, which was covered with red silk and studded with silver, with a Tibetan wolfskin rug thrown over the seat.<sup>11</sup>





1.11  
"Altar of a Dtomba near  
Gan Hai Tze."

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## Collecting

After a six-day trek, the caravan arrived safely in Lijiang, where Roosevelt was greeted by Reverend Andrews, who was glad to host the younger Roosevelt during his stay and assist with any necessary travel arrangements. Through Andrews's connections, Roosevelt found several translators and Dongba priests who helped him locate Naxi artifacts in Lijiang and surrounding villages.

"In the beginning it seemed difficult if not impossible to collect any material," Roosevelt writes, "Well, shortly after I had arrived I discussed with Mr. Andrews the possibility of getting what I wanted. He seemed rather pessimistic, especially as to the likelihood of getting the scrolls, since they had almost disappeared. ... Also, apparently the books were very difficult to get."

The next day, Andrews produced things he had hidden upstairs, giving Roosevelt a Lolo bowl, a human thighbone made into a trumpet ("They never want to sell it, and how he got it I don't know," Roosevelt writes), and a Naxi conch trumpet with a bronze edge.<sup>12</sup>

After several days, Roosevelt was invited by a young man to the house of his deceased brother who had been a Dongba priest, where he bought a whole outfit of a priest. After extensive bargaining, he also acquired four hundred books, a five-lobed crown, and four elaborate Naxi banners, as well as about thirty altar sticks. He tried to buy some cymbals, but he was unsuccessful, for "their belief is that the dtompa's [sic] voice goes into it when he dies, and they won't part with them for anything."<sup>13</sup>

Roosevelt later bought from a Dongba priest a nicely carved "traveling scepter" with a bell attached and a scroll.<sup>14</sup>



I actually have almost everything I need right now, after being here only few days. I haven't actually enumerated the things, and there are lots of good Tibetan knives, charm boxes, swords, crossbows of the Lisu tribe, and most important a dtompa sword for dancing. ... Just now a boy came in with another lot of books, circ. 300. And another long scroll, by golly, making two in my possession and three bought, and two negotiated for. The museum ought to feel lucky, because they are darned difficult to get. These are perhaps the only ones left, and in another year it will be impossible. Then, also, (the boy) brought in a cymbal, which I bought after much bargaining for two hundred Yunnan dollars. He claims it is 200 years old ... The dtompas hand it from father to son, and each time add a little strip of cloth to the handle for each generation. This is supposed to have twelve generations behind it. Again the museum ought to feel lucky. These have almost certainly never been sold before.<sup>15</sup>

And he continues:

When we got back (from an excursion to a Tibetan monastery and a hermitage) I discovered more Naxi books and the promise of another scroll. Mr. Andrews says that usually to collect this type of scroll and book takes three years. The reason is that the dtompas, the last few that there are, are now selling out, and soon they will cease to exist. I certainly came out in the nick of time. ... I'm following with an inventory of everything I've got so far in case anyone would like to know.<sup>16</sup>

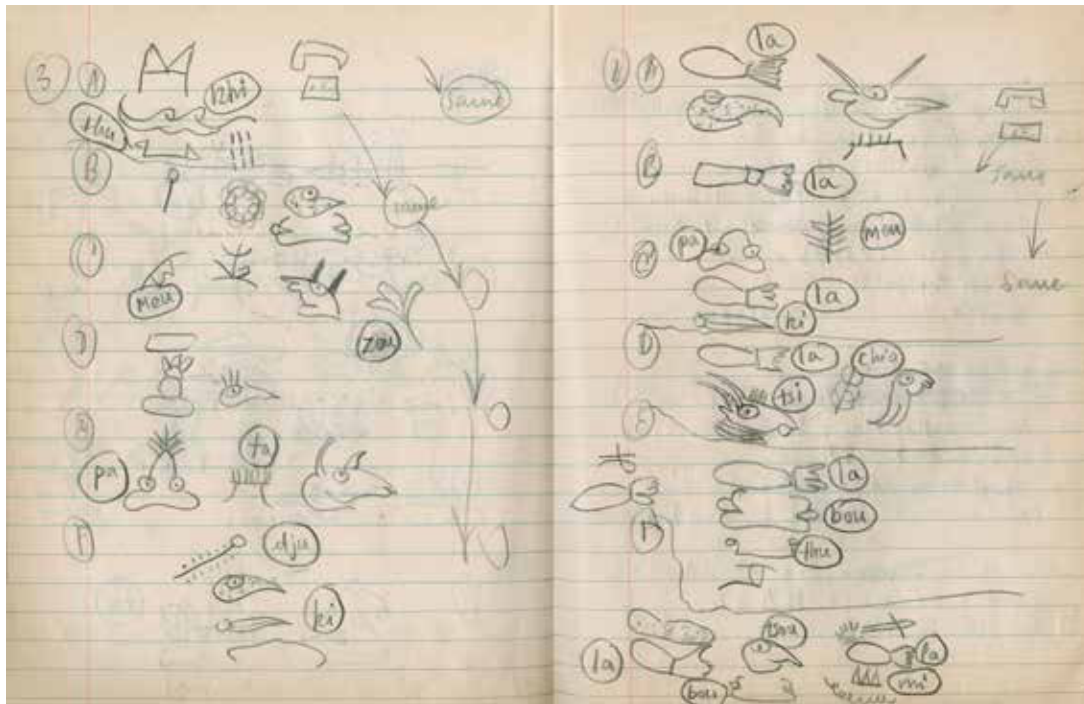
Based on this detailed list, we know that Quentin Roosevelt collected nine furs (snow leopard, lynx, snow wolf, golden monkey, and panda), a pipe, teapots, Tibetan manuscripts, ritual cards, coins, eight Tibetan painted scrolls, ritual implements, twelve Naxi paintings (he called them "banners"), six long scrolls (five on cloth and one on paper), and fifteen hundred Naxi books.

While among the Naxi, Roosevelt learned about Dongba ceremonial rituals, religious iconography, and manuscript literature. He filled his travel journal with pages of hand-drawn pictographs, sketches of religious symbols and deities, and detailed notes about ceremonial funeral scrolls that would later become the primary source material for his thesis.

After only ten days in Lijiang, Roosevelt traveled comfortably back via Dali to Kunming and from there to Haiphong in a private car that was offered him by the head of the rail company. In Haiphong, he boarded a tiny steamer with a Vietnamese family, two hundred cows, and four hundred pigs. On June 9 in Hong Kong, Roosevelt boarded the Empress of Canada, which brought him via Yokohama and Honolulu to San Francisco. He arrived in New York at the beginning of July 1939 with about twenty crates of collected items. "It will be a very welcome feeling to get back," he wrote to his mother. "I expect we'll all meet at the River Club as usual. It will be very nice indeed. Just wait until you see all my things. I still have almost half of my money left, too."

Even after Roosevelt's return to the United States, the collection grew: he had asked Reverend Andrews to collect specific objects for him. Andrews wrote: "I have a few things here for you, and shall be sending them off as soon as I have a good collection. I want to do the best for you. I have no place for rubbish, and I desire to get things that you will not be ashamed to show any where."<sup>17</sup> In a later letter, Andrews pointed out that the prices for Naxi books had increased considerably and that he was afraid the prices would increase even more because of an expected visit by Joseph Rock to the region:

Now my express purpose of writing you at this time is as follows. Do you need any more Naxi books? If you do, please let me know at once, by wire, and I will hire men



1.12 a, b  
 Quentin Roosevelt's sketches  
 of Dongba pictographs from  
 his undated school notebook.

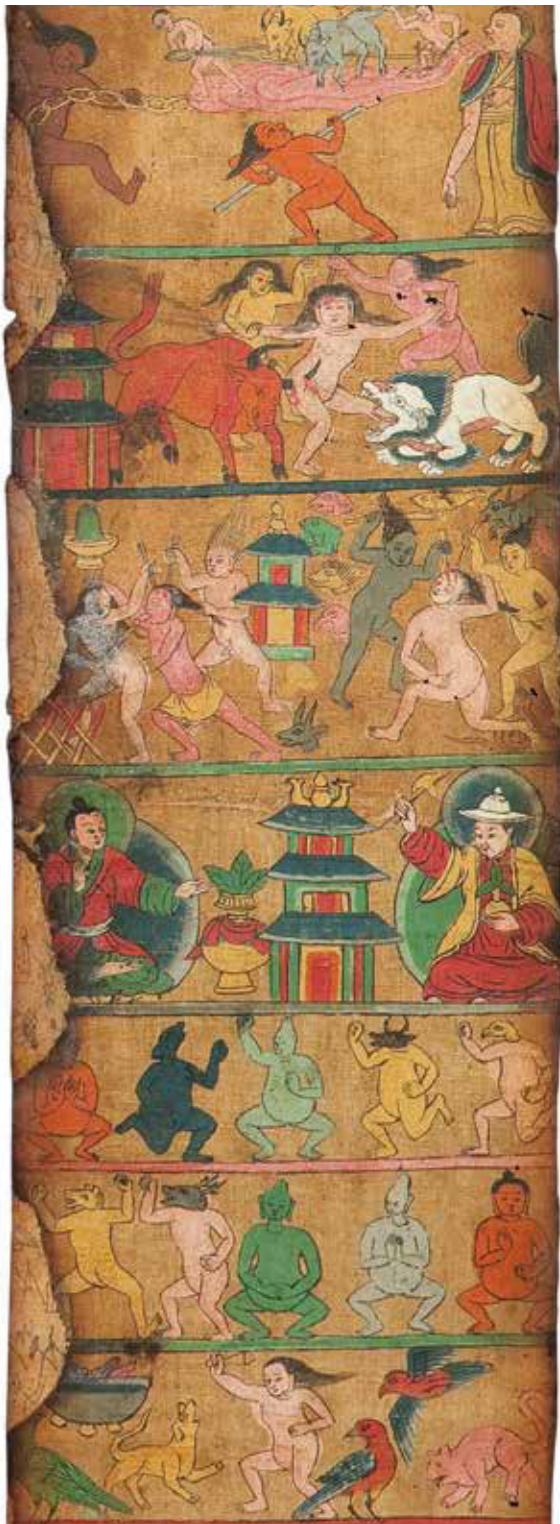
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to go around and buy all you require. If you need a thousand more, just wire OK, and I will know and go ahead and get them, and anything else on the market. The reason for this rush is this, I have heard that ROCK is on his way to Likiang from Honolulu. A wire came to Likiang last night asking that a house be got ready for him. Now, if he comes here, he will buy up all the books he can put his men to buy, and the value of them will go up in price 200%. In fact, it will be hopeless to try and buy against him, and his men will see that no books are brought here. Now, if you desire me to go ahead, just say OK. I don't want to go and buy up a lot of books that you have no use for. I have a few here. But I will gladly make up a horse load if you still require them.<sup>18</sup>

And thus, with Andrews's help, Roosevelt acquired more manuscripts. Reserving a few artifacts for his personal collection in Oyster Bay, Roosevelt sent the bulk to his sponsors. He later sold the Naxi books he had collected to the Library of Congress: eleven hundred books in September 1940 and one thousand seventy-three books in November 1945.<sup>19</sup>

## Pictographs and Funeral Scrolls

Back at Harvard, Roosevelt undertook his highly ambitious undergraduate thesis, "A Preliminary Study of the Nashi People: Their History, Religion, and Art." His detailed descriptions of art objects and hand-drawn examples of various writing systems and iconography add a much-needed dimension to Dongba scholarship. In particular, when he compares the pictographic "shelu" (sijiulujiu) script and the phonetic "gurrhba" (geba) script, his nuanced observations and methodical presentation of the material are rare contributions. One should be aware that after 1949, the Dongba religion was proscribed by the Communist authorities. Dongba studies were very limited. In China, the work of linguists, historians, and social scientists was mainly focused on documenting museum collections, while the

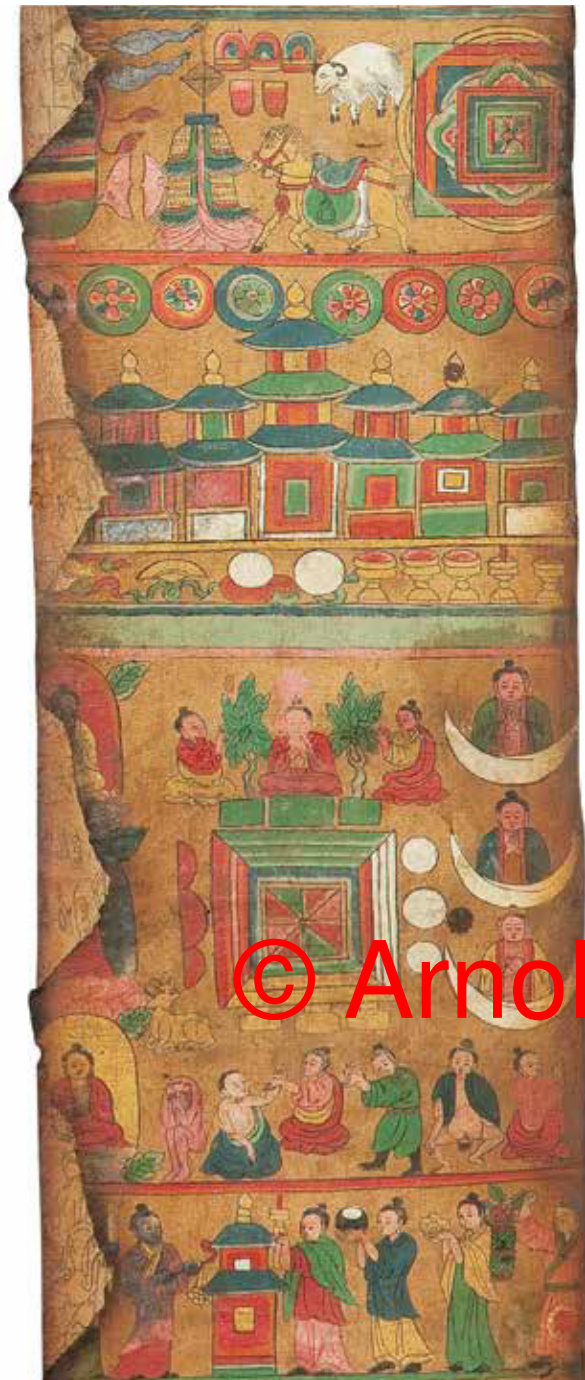


a

1.13 a-d  
Funeral scroll (Hei Zhi Pi)  
Northwestern Yunnan Province,  
China  
Ink and paint on fabric, paper  
358 1/4 x 9 in. (910 x 23 cm)  
Collection of the daughters  
of Quentin Roosevelt

1.13 c (top)  
Here Dongba Shilo leads the  
soul through the realm of the  
titans (lamaye) where there is  
still fighting and killing. He is  
riding his horse and carrying a  
flag and a flat bell (zara) used  
by Dongba priests and Bonpo  
priests and monks. Behind

him is a white horse carry-  
ing a naka (thread sculpture).  
The naka is Dongba Shilo's  
soul. The dragon above also  
symbolizes the transformation  
of Dongba Shilo's soul and its  
ascension to the heavens.  
This scroll is quite likely the  
one collected by Quentin



b

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Roosevelt's father and uncle  
Kermit and which sparked  
Quentin's interest in the Naxi.



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c



d



foreign anthropologists who returned to conduct research in China in the late 1980s had limited opportunities to study the Dongba tradition. It is safe to assume that little or no Dongba art was produced in Lijiang for more than four decades, and when the Dongba religion was rehabilitated in the mid-1990s, Dongba cultural production could not possibly return to where it had been interrupted.

Roosevelt approached the pictographs with a critical eye for artistry. He writes:

The calligraphy in the pictographic characters is remarkably deft and competent. There is something vigorous and alive in the little animals, they seem to live and breathe. The economy of line with which they are executed makes them extremely convincing, and indeed there is not a superfluous drop of ink in their whole makeup. As I will show later, this style appears also in the painted funeral scrolls, especially the more ancient ones.<sup>20</sup>

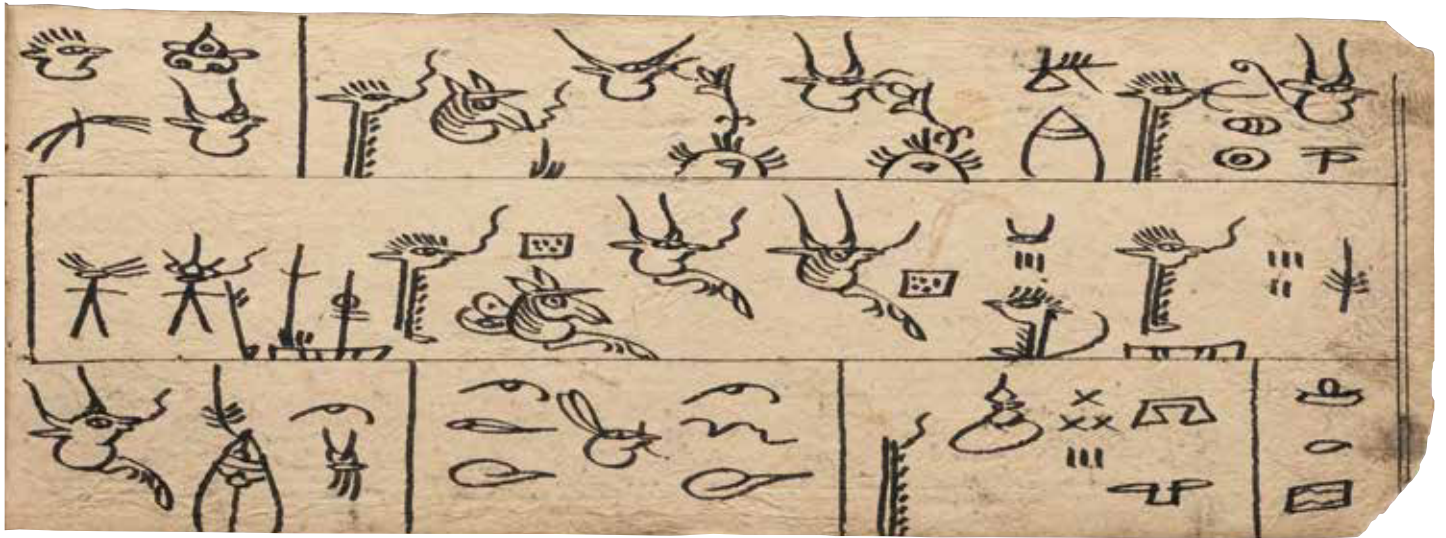
Later in the thesis, he draws the connection between the pictographic characters and the painting style: "Certain characters seem only to have been enlarged, with no other change, and transplanted bodily to the scroll or banner."<sup>21</sup>

The core of his thesis consists of a close comparison of five Hei Zhi Pi, or ceremonial funeral scrolls. These scrolls, some of them forty feet long and covered with intricately painted scenes, are of great importance in the Dongba religion, as they act as a bridge for the soul to reach the realm of the gods. Roosevelt builds his analysis around one scroll in particular ("the most beautiful of the scrolls, and fortunately ... the best preserved"), providing an exhaustive examination of the cosmology, iconography, and artistic technique.<sup>22</sup> Using Rock's translation of a manuscript that would be chanted aloud during the funerary ceremony, he summarizes the significance of each scene depicted on the scroll, beginning from the depths of hell and ending at the realm of the gods. While most Hei Zhi Pi scrolls contain essential symbols and scenes that are similar, no two scrolls are exactly alike. Roosevelt points out differences between the five scrolls (and compares the manuscript and scroll that Rock describes), attributing variations to both the time period of the scrolls' creation and evaluating the skill of the artist. Roosevelt appreciated the sketchy but skillful Dongba style. He writes, "With marvelously few lines the artist shows the yaks, oxen, or horses prancing, galloping and rearing, and the lines have a taut look, like a tightly-coiled spring. The function of the limbs is perfectly understood, and the proportions are perfect."<sup>23</sup>

In analyzing the iconographic manifestation of Naxi syncretism, Roosevelt refers to other forms of East Asian art and iconography, including Tibetan, Jain, Indian, and Nepalese styles. He demonstrates a keen sense of artistic comparison when identifying stylistic differences between Tibetan and Dongba painting, pointing out that "although the Naxi painting has generally more freedom and fresh vigor than the orthodox painting of the Lama Buddhist Church in Tibet, it lacks a great deal of its sophistication and finish."<sup>24</sup> He further writes: "The [Tibetan] artist has placed so much emphasis on the intricate details that the individual figures merely form part of the main decorative design. In the Naxi example, the artist has made each of the figures active; they all seem to dance."<sup>25</sup>

For Roosevelt the art of Tibet was frozen when Buddhism came into Tibet, with its rigid system of monasteries and religious establishments: "The technique matured and became marvelously efficient, but the imagination was shackled; every dot and line of shading had to be in a particular place, and it had to be of a prescribed size."<sup>26</sup>

Roosevelt also compares the art of Ajanta with the art of the Jains; he describes the Jain artist's "purely linear style" whereas the artist in Ajanta "has seen the possibilities of making the abstract form beautiful. He has been aided in this by his ability to represent



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the third dimension.”<sup>27</sup> According to Roosevelt, “The same comparison holds true to a limited extent between the Tibetan lama painting and the painting on the Naxi scrolls, for the former generally have a sort of stilted plasticity, while the latter are generally almost purely linear.”<sup>28</sup>

In addition, Roosevelt includes a comparison of Dongba and Tibetan iconography, pointing out in great detail similarities and differences between the Dongba notion of the six realms of possible rebirth portrayed on the funeral scroll and the Buddhist notion of six realms in a Wheel of Life or Existence.

Roosevelt drew heavily on the published work of Joseph Rock, who lived among the Naxi for twenty-seven years and whose scholarship remains the most reliable and whose dictionary is the most complete. Unfortunately Roosevelt could not take full advantage of Rock’s sources and findings, as the bulk of this scholarship was published after the war. Roosevelt tried to contact Rock before he traveled to Lijiang and sent him a letter with many questions, but Rock never replied.<sup>29</sup>

When reading Roosevelt’s thesis, one should be aware of the limits of scholarship and the paucity of secondary source material on Chinese minorities at the time. But even today, many questions that Roosevelt raised concerning the origin of the Naxi, the pictographs, and the Dongba religion are unsolved and debated among scholars. Was Roosevelt wrong

1.14  
Naxi manuscript.  
4 x 11 ¼ in.  
(10 x 28.5 cm)  
Private Collection  
2.695

1.15  
Detail from a Naxi manuscript.  
Private Collection  
2.695

1.16  
Quentin Roosevelt on his 1939  
journey.



when he attempted to place the historical origin of the Naxi in the Tibetan epic of Gesar or when he claimed the Dongba religion was a form of pre-Buddhist Bon with a mixture of indigenous shamanism? Today we know that the issue of the relationship between the Dongba and Bon traditions is complex and still subject to debate. The least that can be said about the Dongba religion is that it is a multilayered tradition with some ties to the ancient Bon as well as to the systematized post-Buddhist tradition.<sup>30</sup>

Roosevelt's enduring and greatest contribution remains bringing unique and exceptional artifacts to the United States—objects that probably would have been ruined during the Cultural Revolution—and bringing them to the attention of a larger public, not only through his thesis but also and especially through several articles in popular magazines. Indirectly, he contributed to this publication and exhibition, which are based on the material that he collected more than sixty years ago.



After graduation from Harvard, Roosevelt was commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. In 1942 he went overseas with the First Division; in February 1943, while on the Tunisian front, he was wounded by a bullet from the machine gun of a low-flying Messerschmitt fighter plane. From August until October 1943 he was a Battery Commander in Sicily; from October 1943 until June 1944 he served in the First Division in England and participated in the amphibious assault on Omaha Beach in Normandy on June 6. From July 1944 until March 1945 he worked at the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.) Headquarters in Washington, D.C., in preparation for a tour of duty in China that he took from March until September 1945 as Secret Intelligence Chief, O.S.S., in Chongqing. He left service in the beginning of January 1946. He was decorated many times for his service, winning the

Purple Heart, Bronze Star, Silver Star, and the Croix de Guerre. On April 12, 1944, while stationed in England, he married Frances Blanche Webb, with whom he had three daughters: Alexandra, Anna, and Susan.<sup>31</sup> He was engaged by Pan American Airways in 1946 to establish the company's commercial routes in China. In 1947 he was named vice president and director of the China National Aviation Corporation in Shanghai. Quentin Roosevelt died in a plane crash in December 1948 forty miles northeast of Hong Kong when he was twenty-nine.<sup>32</sup>



"There, in that mountainous country, segregated from the rest of China, I found what one writer has called Shangri-La, a place of great peace. The natives know nothing of the outside world, and care less. They have only vague notions that war is going on in China."

—Quentin Roosevelt<sup>33</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 Eleanor Butler Alexander-Roosevelt, *Day Before Yesterday, The Reminiscences of Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 401.
- 2 Roosevelt writes "Nashi" as in his time there was no pinyin, which is now the standard system of Romanization. "Nashi," "Lichiang," "Likiang," and "Lanchow" were all standard spellings for that time.
- 3 The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, contributed \$300; the Harvard-Yenching Institute, \$100; the Peabody Museum, \$100; a private donor, \$100.
- 4 From a letter written on March 3, 1939, signed by the director, Donald Scott; courtesy Roosevelt family archive.
- 5 Memorandum for Mr. Roosevelt, Department of State, Passport Agency, February 27, 1939; courtesy Roosevelt family archive.
- 6 Letter from Roosevelt to his mother, undated; courtesy Roosevelt family archive.
- 7 The third sister was Ching-ling Soong, the wife of Sun Yat-sen, the first President of the Republic of China and known as the "Father of Modern China."
- 8 Because the notebook not only contains notes and sketches from his 1939 trip but also from his overseas tour of duty as S.I. Chief O.S.S. in Chongqing, some of this information does not date from 1939 but to his 1945 trip from Chongqing through Yunnan to Calcutta. As Roosevelt very seldom dates his entries, it is virtually impossible to determine to which travel any given entry relates.
- 9 Roosevelt mentions carrying this sum to the Chinese guerillas only in the December 1939 issue of *The Harvard Advocate*, on page 6. It is not mentioned in any letter.
- 10 Based on a detailed travel log, he arrived in Lanzhou on April 17 and flew back to Kunming on April 20.
- 11 Back in the U.S., Roosevelt sent the general a pistol in appreciation of his valuable help.
- 12 Letter from Roosevelt to his mother, page 4, undated; courtesy Roosevelt family archive. The Lolo are today called the Yi people, the seventh largest of the fifty-five official ethnic minority groups within the People's Republic of China.
- 13 Letter from Roosevelt to his mother, page 4, undated; courtesy Roosevelt family archive.
- 14 Roosevelt used this expression in a letter to his mother, page 4b, undated; courtesy Roosevelt family archive.
- 15 Letter from Roosevelt to his mother, page 4b, undated; courtesy Roosevelt family archive.
- 16 Letter from Roosevelt to his mother, page 5b, undated; courtesy Roosevelt family archive.
- 17 James H. Andrews, in a letter dated March 27, 1940; courtesy Roosevelt family archive.
- 18 August 14, 1940; courtesy Roosevelt family archive. In a later letter to Roosevelt dated November 1, 1940, Andrews mentions 1,500 books he wanted to collect. Later he wrote that he had collected roughly 1,000 books that he wanted to send with other items via Rangoon to the U.S. For all these items, Roosevelt owed Andrews \$954.94, including telegrams and postage. It is not clear if the collected items finally reached Roosevelt.
- 19 The Library of Congress paid \$2,000 in September 1940 and \$1,000 in November 1945. Acc. No. 601 603 and 0855E; courtesy Roosevelt family archive.
- 20 Quentin Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study of the Nashi People: Their History, Religion and Art" (honors thesis, Harvard College, 1941), 57.
- 21 Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study," 84.
- 22 Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study," 73.
- 23 Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study," 84.
- 24 Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study," 76.
- 25 Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study," 77.
- 26 Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study," 75.
- 27 Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study," 79.
- 28 Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study," 76.
- 29 Rock, who was not on good terms with Andrews, certainly knew about Roosevelt's friendship with Andrews. This is possibly the reason why Rock never replied to Roosevelt.
- 30 See Christine Mathieu's essay in this volume.
- 31 I am very grateful to Sandy Roosevelt for her patience and willingness to allow me to go through the family archive in her home.
- 32 There were rumors of sabotage, fueled by Roosevelt's past as a World War II officer with the Office of Strategic Services, but these could never be substantiated.
- 33 Quoted in Francis E. Carey, "He's an Explorer at 19," *The Hartford Courant*, October 15, 1939.



## CHAPTER 2

# A Brief History of the Naxi People

Guo Dalie (郭大烈)

Translated by Runxiao Zhu and Christine Mathieu

The Naxi people of southwestern China are one of the fifty-five minority ethnic nationalities in China. Together with the Mosuo, they currently number about 320,000, with the vast majority (approximately 240,000 people) living in the region centered on the old city of Lijiang in Yunnan Province. Before the 1990s Lijiang was very remote and difficult to reach. Lijiang was named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997, and the Dongba pictographic script of the Naxi was made a UNESCO World Memory in 2003. Lijiang now welcomes more than six million tourists every year.

The Naxi people are believed to be descended from nomadic tribes of northwestern China, Han Chinese, and others. The most remote of the Naxi's ancestors migrated to the southwest as early as the second century BCE. China has a vast territory, and the southwestern part of the country is mostly mountains and deep valleys, which are difficult to access. In ancient China, central authorities could not rule these frontier regions effectively, and local powers held sway.

From 58 to 74 CE the Bai Lang Yi (White Wolf Barbarians), a tribal people, ancestors of the Naxi, traveled thousands of miles to Luoyang, then the capital of the Eastern Han dynasty. The Bai Lang are credited with a set of three poems that describe their journey to the south and are known as the Bai Lang Songs. One poem has survived into the contemporary period in the original language and transcribed into Chinese characters. This poem

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2.1  
Naxi territories spread east and west of the Jinshajiang River, amid high mountains and deep valleys.  
Photograph by Cindy Ho

contains 44 sentences and 176 words, of which 90 have phonetic correspondences in contemporary Naxi language.

In 240 CE Zhu Geliang, the chancellor of the Kingdom of Shu Han during the period of the Three Kingdoms, conquered the Mo-sha Yi (Mo-sha Barbarians) who controlled salt and iron mines in southern Sichuan. The name Mo-sha is believed to be a precursor of Mo-so and the event is the first historical reference to the Naxi's most direct ancestors.

From 581 to 959 CE during the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties, what is today southwestern China was under the political aegis of the Tibetan Yarlung dynasty and of the Yi and Bai people of the Nanzhao kingdom centered on present-day Dali. The Naxi lived between these two dominant powers. In the seventh century, the Naxi were made subjects of the Tang empire. Then in the ninth century the Nanzhao rulers took control of Lijiang and renamed the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain their northern sacred peak.

The Tibetans and the Naxi have long historical ties. In 703 the Tibetan Tsenpo King Dusong Mangpoje ('du srong mang po rje; 676–704) headed south to Lijiang, where he died the following year. According to legend, a Tibetan prince married a beautiful Naxi girl. The Yarlung dynasty also assigned provincial governors in Lijiang, beginning a cultural exchange between Lijiang and Tibet that continued for 1,300 years. The Naxi's struggles with the Tibetans were also narrated in the famous epic of Gesar of Ling.

Between 1253 and 1723 Lijiang became the center of the Naxi kingdom, under the hereditary rule of the Ah and Mu families. The Mu brought relative stability and rapid social, economic, and cultural development to the region.

In 1253 the Mongol Kublai Khan led his armies from northwestern China (Ningxia and Gansu) through Sichuan to the Dali Kingdom. The Mongols used leather rafts to cross the Jinshajiang (Golden Sand River) to the north of Lijiang. The Naxi leader Ah-cong Ah-liang submitted to the invading troops, and Kublai Khan made him a local governor. Indirect rule through hereditary local governors gave the imperial powers the means to stabilize and secure remote minority regions.

During the early Ming period, the Naxi king Ah-jia Ah-de was given the Chinese surname of Mu by Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang. The Mu ruled Lijiang for twenty-two generations and a period of four hundred seventy years until the Qing administration took control in 1723. For the greater part of their rule, the Mu relied on the trust and support of the Ming-dynasty emperors. They expanded their kingdom into Tibetan territory in the north, through Muli and Ninglang in Sichuan in the northeast and to Nujiang in the west. The Mu family also formed political unions with outside powers through marriage. They mined gold and silver, accumulating great wealth, and provided the last Ming emperor, Chongzhen, with funds to build fortifications in the north for the imperial tombs.

The Mu family had a strong interest in Han Chinese culture. Six of the Mu rulers wrote poetry for posterity, especially the twelfth Naxi king, who composed six major works comprising 806 poems. Some of these poems are still cherished today. The Mu family also patronized many religions including Taoism, Chinese Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism. Mu Zeng, who was a devout Buddhist, spent ten years printing 108 volumes of the Tibetan edition Tripitaka (Bkav-vgyur), and later dedicated it to the Jokhang Temple in Tibet.

The system of indirect rule under the Mu kings led to stability, but it was a closed society that eventually constrained economic development. After 1723 the Qing government took direct control, sending imperial officials to Lijiang. The Qing developed agriculture and water conservancy, set up schools to promote Naxi culture, and established national civil examinations for public office. From 1723 to 1911 a total of sixty Naxis reached the second degree in the national civil service and seven Naxis reached the third degree. Two were promoted to the highest academic institutions of the Qing Imperial Academy.

The economic and cultural development of Lijiang reached its height after the Qing dynasty was overthrown by Sun Yat-sen's revolution in 1911. In the 1930s Japan invaded China and occupied first the eastern provinces and eventually reached the western frontier and into Burma. During World War II Lijiang was beyond enemy lines, and it was the only land route from Yunnan to India via Tibet. Each year more than 25,000 horses and 1,200 merchants traveled this route. Lijiang also had strategic importance for air traffic; even the famous American "Flying Tigers" opened up a new air route in Lijiang.

In 1949 the Chinese Communist Party established the People's Republic of China, and the Naxi region underwent profound changes. First there was land reform: land was distributed free to farmers. The government then organized agricultural cooperatives and reformed private industry and corporations, gradually transforming those into public-private partnerships or state-owned corporations. Workers and peasants began to participate in state management. The new Lijiang Prefecture's People's Government was established. On April 10, 1961, the Lijiang Naxi Autonomous County was founded. In 2003 there were new administrative reforms and Lijiang Prefecture became Lijiang Municipality. Accordingly, the Lijiang Naxi Autonomous County was split into Yulong Naxi Autonomous County and the Old Town district (county level), with 220,000 people in the first county and 120,000 in the second.

As happened in other parts of China, after the revolution of 1949, Lijiang experienced difficult setbacks during three years (1959–62) of natural disasters and ten years (1966–76) of the Cultural Revolution. However, after the political reforms of 1979, Lijiang underwent fundamental changes. Collectivized lands were redistributed to households. Farmers could plant freely and were allowed to sublet their lands. The new economic regime also abolished the agricultural tax, which had been imposed for more than one thousand years. In the city the collectivized state system of rationing crops, food, and clothes was discontinued. The government encouraged individual and privately owned business enterprises as well as private transportation to stimulate the market and to promote local economic development.

Improvements to transportation were rapid and far reaching. In 1995 the Lijiang Airport was built. The highway from Dali to Lijiang was greatly improved and transportation from Lijiang to the outside was no longer arduous. And in 2009 the railway linked Kunming and Lijiang. Lijiang has now experienced more than fifteen years of sustained and rapid economic growth. In 1994 the Yunnan provincial government held its tourism conference in Lijiang and decided to make Lijiang an international tourist city. On February 3, 1996, however, a massive earthquake of magnitude seven shook Lijiang. The disaster brought both domestic and international attention and support. On December 4, 1997, the Old Town of Lijiang became one of the UNESCO world cultural heritage sites, thereby greatly enhancing the reputation of the region. Today the Chinese government pays special attention to protecting and restoring the cultural relics of Lijiang, such as the famous mural paintings at the Baisha temple, and maintaining the historic Lijiang town built by the Mu family during the Ming dynasty.

Economic prosperity has also fostered cultural development and change, and with this a revival of Naxi traditions including the Dongba religious practices. The Dongba religion is an animistic tradition, passed down from ancient times. It does not have professional priests, formal organization, or fixed places of worship such as temples. However, the Dongba religion possesses a unique Naxi legacy in the form of a pictographic language, now known as the Dongba script. Together with Dongba painting, music, and dance, this script is the greatest treasure of Naxi culture. In the 1980s the Naxi intellectual He Wanbao coined the term "Dongba culture" and gave impetus to the full rehabilitation of the Dongba tradition.

One hundred years before this revival, European and American scholars and missionaries had already become aware of Dongba culture. In 1913 the French scholar Jacques Bacot published a study of the Dongba in France, which included some Dongba manuscripts. However, the Austrian-born American scholar Joseph F. Rock spent the longest time with the Naxi and published the most about them. From 1922 to 1949 Rock did extensive research in the Naxi regions. He published *The Ancient Na-Khi Kingdom of South-West China* in the United States in 1947, and his encyclopedia of Dongba culture, *A Nakhi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary*, was published in Italy in 1963 and 1972. In China the scholar Li Lincan also published a Naxi pictographic and phonetic dictionary, as well as other books. Later, Fang Guoyu published his own Naxi pictographic dictionary. These two scholars set a good foundation for further Dongba cultural research in China. In the 1960s the Lijiang county government organized well-known Dongba priests and scholars to begin the translation of Dongba ritual manuscripts, under extremely difficult conditions.

Established in 1980, the Lijiang Dongba Cultural Research Institute engaged Dongba priests and Naxi scholars to transcribe, translate, and preserve the entire Dongba ceremonial corpus. After nearly twenty years the institute finally completed this task and published *An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts* in one hundred volumes. In 1983, 1999, and 2003 Lijiang hosted three large-scale academic conferences that were attended by scholars from Europe, Asia, and the United States. Meanwhile Chinese scholars have also gone abroad to give lectures, and they have published hundreds of research papers. In addition Yunnan Ethnic University, Chongqing Southwest University, and Shanghai East China Normal University have launched Dongba cultural studies at undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. Naxi studies held a prominent place in the Sixteenth World Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) held in Kunming, Yunnan Province, in 2009. Since 1999, the education department in Lijiang has paid special attention to teaching Naxi Dongba culture in elementary schools; its textbooks and CDs were presented at the IUAES conference in Kunming and were well received.

Today, Dongba culture is promoted by the development of cultural parks such as those at Dongba Valley and at the Jade Water Village at the foot of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. There, during the summer, hundreds of international visitors and students come and learn about Dongba culture.

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# My Experience of Dongba Religion and Art

He Limin (和力民)

Translated by Runxiao Zhu and Christine Mathieu

## My original interest in Dongba art

I was born in Gongshan Dulong and Nu Autonomous County, in Nujiang, Yunnan Province. North of Gongshan is the Tibet Autonomous Region and to the west is Myanmar. I went to school in Gongshan Dulong when I was seven years old, but when I was in the fifth grade, my parents sent me to Sanyuan to live with my grandparents. And so I grew up in Sanyuan, a village twelve kilometers southeast of the Old Town of Lijiang in Yunnan Province.

Not long after my parents sent me to Lijiang, the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) began. On three occasions, I was forced to interrupt my schooling, as many other children and young people in China did, in order to do agricultural work. When I was in middle school, we had classes in a room above the headquarters of the local production brigade. One day, one of my classmates dragged an old, long rectangular chest from a corner. It was filled with old books. We took them out and looked through them. The books were not written in Chinese characters; instead they were filled with drawings, animal patterns, and strange symbols. Some had color illustrations. My classmates and I tried to read these symbols, but I was especially fascinated. The books had been confiscated from local Dongba families by the Red Guards, and it was only because our classroom was above the brigade headquarters that we were able to see these “poisonous weeds,” as the Red Guards called the books.

Later I learned from my family that these were Dongba manuscripts and that they were the legacy of our ancestors. They told me that my grandmother’s family was from the oldest and most influential Dongba clan in our village and that some of her relatives had been famous Dongba priests up to the Republican period (1912–49). Among them, He Guihua (who was also known as Dongba Yuzhao), and his son He Mingkui (Dongba Wen-

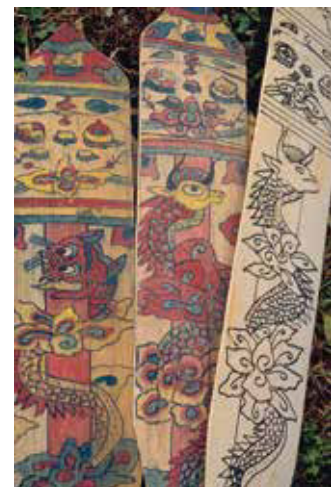
3.1

(left) He Limin paints a wooden slat (kobiu) in preparation for the Sigv ceremony, offered to the Nagas, or serpent and dragon spirits, which the Dongba call si, lv, or leemee, the latter being cognates of the Tibetan klu and Chinese long. The Dongba priests sacrifice to the Nagas at springtime to obtain wealth, longevity, health, and medicine.

3.2

(right) Painted kobiu showing dragon guardian deities.

All photographs in this chapter by Cindy Ho





can) had great standing. The American scholar Joseph Rock and the Chinese scholars Tao Yunkui and Li Lincan had visited them during the first half of the twentieth century and collected their Dongba manuscripts. My grandmother also told me stories about the Dongba rituals and festivals that had taken place in our village in the past. My maternal grandfather, who grew up in a neighboring village, was also of Dongba lineage. My mother told me that her father's family had practiced traditional Dongba medicine. When she was young, my mother and her younger sister had seen many Dongba books in our family home, and they had often accompanied relatives into the mountains to collect medicinal plants and herbs. However, from 1950 on, following the revolution, all religious activities stopped in Sanyuan as well as in my maternal grandfather's village. In 1999, with restrictions on religious practices eased, I went back to our village to organize a Dongba heritage class, and in 2000 our clan performed the Dongba Sacrifice to Heaven. After almost half a century, Dongba art and culture had returned to Sanyuan.

It was not until I was in college that I decided to study Dongba culture. One day He Zhiwu, a scholar of Naxi Dongba culture at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, came to my university to deliver a lecture on the Dongba pictographic script. He discussed Naxi Dongba culture and explained its importance, its origins, and its development. I remembered the Dongba manuscripts I had seen as a schoolboy, and I now fully realized their significance to social science. After this lecture I decided that I would not become a writer and instead that I would dedicate myself to the study of Naxi Dongba culture and art.

## My training in Dongba calligraphy, painting, dance, and other artistic activities

After I graduated from college, I worked at the Dongba Culture Research Institute in Lijiang, under the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. At this time we had the assistance of three old Dongba priests: He Yuncai, He Yunzhang, and Yang Shixing. Our work consisted of transcribing ceremonial texts in the International Phonetic Alphabet as the Dongba priests chanted from the ritual manuscripts. We then translated these texts into Chinese. My colleagues and I were new at this task, and we often had problems understanding archaic terms, which led to lively arguments. From my perspective it was impera-

3.3

(left) The world of the Nagas, with guardian dragons on either side of the gates.

3.4

(right) Flat-top kobiu depicting Naga demons.

The Dongbas use two types of kobiu: one type has a pointed top as is shown above and the other has a flat top.

The former represent gods as well as ghosts and demons, and the latter represent dangerous ghosts.

3.5  
(left) He Limin reads from a manuscript.

3.6  
(right) He Limin wearing the ka, the Dongba crown—in the center lobe is Dongba Shilo, next is Dalamibbu (the tiger-fire god, the Bon deity Tagla Membar), and Garuda.



tive to fully understand the complete ritual text: from what was actually written on the page to what each of the pictographs meant. I would note everything—every line, word, name, and sentence. After two years, I went to Beijing University to study philosophy and religion. By then I was able to write to my Dongba teachers using the pictographs. I learned later that they were always very excited to receive my letters and that they would sit in the courtyard of the Research Institute everyday, reading my letters over and over.

It was not until I had returned to Lijiang in 1986 that I actually learned to write Dongba books. My first Dongba teacher was He Yunzhang from Ludian. As he could not speak any Chinese and could only explain the contents of the manuscripts by using his native Naxi, he was often overlooked for the translating work at the Research Institute. He was very kind, honest, and dedicated, and I invited him to collaborate on my own research projects. He taught me how to write pictographs and how to paint. He even composed a Beginner Course in Dongba Art for my benefit. In addition to writing and painting, he made beautiful and lively bamboo and papier-maché sculptures of yaks, horses, and goats.

After several years, as his health began failing him, He Yunzhang returned to his home village. He Shicheng was my second master. Like He Yunzhang, He Shicheng spoke no Chinese and used Naxi to explain the ritual texts. He was, however, extremely talented and had the most extraordinary memory. He taught me about Dongba rituals, manuscripts, and religious beliefs. He also invited me to join in many Dongba ceremonies where I learned Dongba singing, dancing, painting, and sculpture through active participation. Even after He Shicheng returned to his hometown, he continued to teach me various dances and ritual moves whenever I visited him.

Thus for a period of twenty years, I learned about Dongba culture from living with the old Dongba priests at the Research Institute; they supported me warmly and taught me so generously. He Yuncai, He Yunzhang, Yang Shixing, He Shicheng, He Xuezhi, Zheng Wusan, He Chengdian, He Kaixiang, and He Jigui— their friendly faces, the depth of their chanting, their knowledge, and the physical power and flexibility with which they performed rituals—all inspired my studies in Dongba art and culture.

Since my very first day at the Institute, I have been engaged with the old priests, learning with them wherever they take me—in their houses, in the fields or forests, and mountain regions—and they still teach me and inspire me today. In 1998 He Xuewen from Jizi, in Tai'an County, became my master. He taught me how to dance and chant from the Dongba manuscripts and devoted six years to instructing me in the fundamentals of Dongba dance. At the same time I also became Xi Anian's student. Xi, from Sanba, in



Zhongdian County, focused his teaching on Dongba religious thought and dance. He Yuzhe, from the same village, also became my master and taught me how to chant and sing Dongba music. I feel truly fortunate to have studied with such eminent Dongba priests at a time when Dongba culture was on the verge of disappearing.

In 1998 I established the Lijiang Naxi Culture Research School in Sanyuan to promote Dongba culture. While I continued to study, I also taught the Dongba scripts, ritual texts, painting, music, dance, and ritual ceremony, balancing practice and theory. We have now held Dongba rituals in many Naxi villages. My Dongba cultural and artistic practice is concerned with the lives of rural people but also with Naxi society in general. I hope to maintain the folk characteristics of Naxi religious art and to contribute to a vigorous and vital Dongba artistic culture.

## My understanding of Dongba artistic standards

To date there has been little formal study of Naxi art and iconography. Simply speaking, therefore, what may be considered beautiful in Dongba art? In the Naxi language the word for “beauty” is ee [w<sup>33</sup>]. Are there standards of beauty in the Dongba manuscripts, in the language of myth and ritual, the fine arts such as paintings and sculptures, chanting, dancing, and ritual performance? I believe Dongba religion and art can be appreciated on the basis of general and individual aesthetic standards—the general standard of beauty, or ee [w<sup>33</sup>], and individual talent, or menyinyibe’ee [m<sup>33</sup> i<sup>55</sup> i<sup>21</sup>be<sup>33</sup>w<sup>33</sup>].

The general standard in Dongba art has three criteria: so [so<sup>21</sup>], ddu [du<sup>33</sup>], and ee [w<sup>33</sup>]. So refers to the teachings passed down through a Dongba lineage. Instruction in ritual practice is always passed through a lineage, which determines not only a Dongba priest’s masters and ancestor Dongba priests but also his tutelary deities. Unless a Dongba priest has such a lineage, no matter how well versed he may be in reading the books, his rituals will have no substance. Ddu refers to Dongba traditional rules. The writing of manuscripts, the fine arts of paintings and sculptures, singing, dancing, and ritual performance are guided by a set of rules and taboos. A Dongba priest who breaks these rules loses legitimacy. Ee, or beauty, implies perfection and purity. In the Dongba religion, the arts of dancing, singing, painting, calligraphy, and ritual performance should be perfected so as to become natural and effortless. Dongba art must also have vigor and yet be balanced and harmonious.

Individual talent, menyinyibe’ee, imbues the various aspects of Dongba art and culture—ritual language, calligraphy, painting, singing, dancing, and ritual performance—with a special dimension. This is brought about by the Dongba priest’s natural ability, his capacity to express deep understanding, creativity, and innovation. Individual talents, however, should not do away with the general established standards. Dongba art is not a place for individual contest and competition.

Most Dongba priests can fulfill general expectations, but not all Dongba priests are able to develop individual artistic talents. Dongba priests believe that a renowned and excellent master can pass onto his disciples some of his strength, talents, and expertise. The Great Dongbas (as the most knowledgeable priests are called) will satisfy all general criteria as well as express their own individual artistic standards. However, even Great Dongbas are not usually able to excel in all of the Dongba art forms. Of course, I am looking at Dongba art from the perspective of traditional wisdom and lore. Unlike Buddhism, Dongba religion was not a full-fledged political religion, and since it has no systematized, formal orthodoxy, it has not developed strict religious and academic aesthetic rules and standards, but it is undeniable that Dongba religious art has general aesthetic standards.



3.7  
He Limin and He Jigui dancing  
with swords and flat bells.



## My understanding of Dongba artistic styles

Stylistically Dongba art has developed with relative freedom and according to geography. Dongba art has distinct regional styles that are evident in all aspects of artistic production. Painting, calligraphy, dancing, ritual performance, and so forth have assumed different aesthetic forms in different parts of Naxi country. For example, the art of my first master, He Yunzhang, is representative of the art of western Lijiang. In his calligraphy and his painted kobiu, humans and animal figures have a great sense of volume and all assume graceful postures. The brush lines are quite rough, and the color is very heavy. Compared to He Yunzhang's work, the calligraphy and kobiu of my other master, He Shicheng, tend to represent smaller figures and animals, with more natural postures, well-defined lines, and lighter colors. His work is typical of the style found in northern Lijiang. Dongba dance has the same ritual content in all parts of Lijiang: the dance depicts the Dongba priest's dealings with deities, ghosts, and mythical animals. However, Dongba dance styles, like other Dongba art forms, differ from one region to another. My master Xi Anian's style exemplifies the style found in Naxi villages around western Sanba, in Shangri-La County. The main ritual instruments used by the Dongbas in this part of Naxi country are the leather drum, hand drum, and flat bell; the rhythm ratio between the hand drum and the bell is 1:3. The dance style of this region consists for the most part of small steps and controlled hand movements. The dance style from the central region of the Lijiang Naxi Basin, where my teacher He Xuewen resides, is quite different. The dance there consists of large and expansive movements. The ritual instruments are the leather drum, hand drum, sword, and flat bell. For this style, the rhythm ratio between the hand drum and the bell is 1:1. The same ratio is used between the bell and the sword and also between the bell and leather drum.

Although Dongba art has definite regional forms and all artistic productions from one region share common and identifiable elements, all Great Dongbas also have distinct personal styles. These individual styles reflect natural talent, but they also develop from a



3.8  
He Limin and He Jigui dancing. He Jigui holds a small treasure vase with peacock feathers. Women have joined in with offerings. The seven circles on their capes represent seven stars. The stars are not identified. It is believed that originally women's costumes had another two circles representing the sun and the moon.

combination of the teachings passed down the Dongba lineage and a Dongba's own understanding of the art, his own desire for expression, innovation, and creativity. For example, one of my master He Yunzhang's teachers was a Great Dongba, He Wuyou, who lived in Ludian during the Republic period. Having inherited the writing style of He Wuyou, my master's calligraphy tends to be open and free. My other master, He Xuewen, was born to a family of Dongba priests. He studied at an early age with a Great Dongba who focused on his dance skills. As a result, his dance technique is almost perfect, yet his dancing style is very distinct and personal. The chanting and singing of other Dongba masters such as He Yuncai from Ludian and He Kaixiang also convey clear personalities: their voices and styles are outstanding.

## The relationship between Dongba ritual and art

Dongba culture and art are inextricably linked to religion, thus Dongba culture must be understood from the perspective of Dongba religion and its fundamental elements—the priesthood, calligraphy, ritual texts, music, dance, ritual performance, and fine arts. The precise relationship between Dongba art and religion lies in their ritual purpose. If it were not for the rituals, there would have been no priests, no mythology, no pictographic scripts, or manuscripts. Dongba paintings and music were also produced solely for ritual performance. Therefore, without the Dongba religion and ritual, there would be no Dongba culture and art today.

Traditional Dongba culture belongs to the history and the religious tradition of the Naxi people. Dongba art and culture are founded in Dongba religious belief, and they form an integrated whole. Dongba ritual, culture, and art form an ecological chain. Ritual is the fundamental premise and essential condition that maintains the equilibrium of this chain, and therefore it is through ritual that Dongba art and culture can be understood.

# The Dongba Religion

Christine Mathieu (蓝诗田)

Almost everything about the Dongba religion is steeped in mystery—its origins, its manuscripts, its role in the history of the Naxi, its very nature. This Naxi religion has fascinated and baffled Chinese and foreign visitors to Lijiang for well over a century. Joseph Rock believed that the ancient Naxi religion had preserved a pre-Buddhist and purer form of Bon than could be found in Tibet, where Bon had absorbed so much of Buddhism that it had become almost indistinguishable from it. The Dongba religion and Bon share many rituals and deities, as well as a common founder. Indeed, the founder of the Naxi religion, Dongba Shilo, is none other than sTonpa Shenrab Mibo, the founder of the Bon religion. This, however, presents the first difficulty in circumscribing Dongba beliefs and practices because Shenrab Mibo is not the founder of the pre-Buddhist Bon but of the systematized Bon religion that developed after Buddhism was introduced in Tibet in the seventh century.<sup>1</sup> The Dongba tradition does not claim a relationship to Bon or to any other religion. Yet it has significant connections with indigenous and neighboring traditions, such as: the Mosuo Daba religion, which some scholars believe is a precursor of the Dongba tradition; the Yi Bimo, with which the Dongba religion shares a number of rituals and features; Mongolian shamanism; and Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. And yet, the old Naxi religion amounts to more than religious syncretism. Although it is not subject to overarching orthodoxy, the Dongba religion is relatively standardized, endowed with its own art, its own iconography, and, most remarkably, its own manuscript tradition—a corpus of more than one thousand ceremonial books written in a pictographic script found nowhere else in China or Tibet—which is the only living pictographic tradition in the world today.

## An overview of the Naxi Dongba religion

The Dongba religion that is now flourishing in Lijiang is a tradition in a process of adaptation and reconstruction after decades of official proscription.<sup>2</sup> The old Dongba religion, therefore, must be sought in pre-1949 Lijiang, before the establishment of Communist China. But on the eve of the revolution, the Dongba was only one of several religions active in Lijiang—including Chinese Buddhism, Taoism, Tibetan Buddhism (Karmapa sect), the Chinese popular cults, and even Protestant Christianity—and among those, the old Naxi tradition held a tenuous position. In the 1940s, the Naxi were like most people in China: when they wished for children, they prayed to the Taoist fertility goddess Songzi Niang-Niang, and when they died, their relatives called on Chinese Buddhist or Taoist priests to conduct funerals.

The diversity of the religious scene in Republican-era Lijiang may surprise some. Northwestern Yunnan is a mountainous region and is hard to access; in fact, Lijiang remained difficult to reach until the mid-1990s. While remoteness may partly explain how the Naxi developed and preserved a unique tradition like the Dongba religion, it does not



explain the religious cosmopolitanism found in Lijiang before 1949. For this, we must look to political history. Although it is remote, the Naxi territory lies at what was for millennia a significant geopolitical crossroad—between Tibet, Burma, the Chinese interior, and southern Yunnan—and the religious traditions found here reflect a long history of intertribal warfare and migration, of conquests and alliances, and, not least, several centuries of Chinese indirect rule, which culminated in the full integration of Lijiang into the imperial polity in the eighteenth century.

Until 1949 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China, however, many Dongba priests were still active in Naxi villages outside the town of Lijiang, especially in the more remote mountain areas. Some villages were renowned as "Dongba villages" because they were home to many priests, and some Dongba priests were known as "Dongba kings" on account of their superior knowledge and of the large number of ceremonies they could perform. Yet contemporary observers, from Jacques Bacot (1912) to the Chinese magistrate Wang Tuzhui (1930) and Joseph Rock and Quentin Roosevelt (1940s), all reported that the Dongba tradition was on the road to extinction.<sup>3</sup>

## Tools of ceremonies and rituals<sup>4</sup>

In the twentieth century, the Dongba religion had no centralized or formalized organization. It had no temples or monasteries. The Dongba priests were folk practitioners. Their knowledge was passed down from father to son and, apart from their religious duties, the priests worked in the fields.

The Dongba tradition is sometimes called shamanism, but Naxi ritual specialists are, strictly speaking, priests rather than shamans as Dongba rituals do not require trance states or direct contact with gods and demons. Some Dongba priests are indeed capable of entering trances, but when they perform in this state, they no longer act as priests. Ecstatic

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4.1  
Dongba flat bell, zara. This bell is typical of Bon practitioners, and it is called zhang in Tibetan. The objects attached to it (eagle claw, and so forth) give it cosmic power. The cloths attached to the bell may represent the colors of the mandala or the previous generations of Dongba priests who owned the bell.

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
Brass, leather, cloth, and paint  
8 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 8 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 1 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.  
(21.3 x 21.3 x 4.9 cm)  
Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University 39-93-60/6018 (98770078)



#### 4.2

Dongba ritual sword associated with the Yuma, which are winged protective deities.

Nothwestern Yunnan

Province, China

23 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 1 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 1 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

(60.5 x 4 x 3.6 cm)

Courtesy of the Peabody

Museum of Archaeology and

Ethnology, Harvard University

39-93-60/6021 (98770080)



performers are called Leebu or Sani although the term sani is derogatory, being the equivalent of “hag.”<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Dongba ritual has obvious connections to Himalayan and Mongolian shamanism, and the Dongba priests dance, sing, and beat their drums as shamans do. They also wear ceremonial robes, beaded necklaces made from conch shell (bbudde), and ceremonial crowns—five-lobed headdresses called ka, which depict major Dongba deities, including the tutelary deity Dongba Shilo in the middle lobe.

Since the Dongba priests have no temples, ceremonies take place in natural settings—in fields, forest clearings, or near springs—or they may be conducted in people’s courtyards or inside houses. Although ritual spaces are temporary, they are elaborate and decorated with many objects and artworks. A central ritual object is an iron plowshare, which represents Junasiluo, the sacred and mythical mountain that holds the earth and the sky in Naxi mythology. Other ceremonial objects include conch trumpets, demon-battling swords, ghost daggers, drums, gongs, hand bells, eagle claws, wooden scepters, various headdresses decorated with bird feathers, the aforementioned crowns, trident staffs called ba, and the ceremonial books, which are piled and available for priests to chant from: all ceremonies require the chanting of several manuscripts, with the longest ceremonies necessitating up to one hundred manuscripts.

Colored flags, paper flowers, paper cut-outs, and paper money enliven the ceremonial space. The Dongba priests may also use: small wooden structures, shaped as crosses or tripods; highly decorated trees or tree branches on which are hung flags and naka, the Naxi equivalent of the Tibetan namka (silk threads arranged in geometric patterns); and papier-maché sculptures representing animals, deities, demons, and people. These sculptures can be extremely elaborate and can vary in size from doll-like to more than human size. They may be discarded during or after the ritual; some are stored away. Other ceremonial objects recall the Buddhist tradition: butter lamps, bumpa or Buddhist treasures vases, offerings of grains, and flour effigies (dtorma).

## Art and iconography

The Dongba priests produce large paintings of their deities called za, or thangkas (which Rock and Roosevelt called banners), as well as smaller images painted on cardboard. The thangkas are hung in the ritual spaces above or on either side of the altars while the painted cards may be strung above the altar or placed in baskets of offerings. Dongba paintings are not intended for meditative purposes; they are representations of the gods the priest calls upon to preside over the ceremony. Other religious objects include wooden slats called kobiu and a smaller type of kobiu called o-ciu, which are painted with representations of

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4.3 a, b  
Pair of large painted wooden  
slats (kobiu).  
  
Northwestern Yunnan  
Province, China  
Wood, paint  
24 x 4 ½ x ½ in.  
(61 x 11.4 x 1.4 cm)  
Courtesy of the Peabody  
Museum of Archaeology and  
Ethnology, Harvard University  
a. 39-93-60/6014.1 (98790056)  
b. 39-93-60/6014.2 (98790057)

the gods, demons, flowers, animals, and religious symbols that pertain to the ceremony that is to be performed. Kobiu may be very finely decorated and colored; before 1949, most were monochrome. For ceremonies, they are planted into the ground or sometimes placed into baskets of grain offerings.

The ritual paintings (at least those that date from the earlier part of the twentieth century) depict a limited number of deities and various mythical and symbolic animals (such as dragons, lions, tigers, elephants, and Garuda) as well as ritual symbols, such as mystic wheels (kalu), bumpa vases, flowers, and the swastika (yidua). In the paintings, the yidua is depicted turning clockwise in the Buddhist fashion, but in the manuscripts, it is almost always counterclockwise, in the Bon style. Among the most frequently represented deities are Dongba Shilo, the great gods Soyiwade, O'Per, and Lachidomi, and the protective deities Meebeizisi and Tuchi Yuma. In Dongba paintings, Dongba Shilo resides in the south, in the element of fire, and is depicted with a green or, occasionally, a black body; in the Tibetan Bon tradition, Shenrab is usually blue. Shilo sits on a lotus throne, and below him is his white horse. The kobiu are painted for specific ceremonial uses and depict the lower-level gods, evil spirits, animals, or Naga spirits that are featured in the manuscripts from which the Dongba priests will be chanting. The great gods (heiddiu) cannot be depicted on kobiu because they must be displayed on a higher plane within the ritual space.

## Ceremonies

The total number of Dongba ceremonies is difficult to assess because of local variations and because many ceremonies comprise sub-ceremonies. Anthony Jackson estimated that the Dongba corpus contains 133 complete ceremonies.<sup>6</sup> Rock thought there were “120-odd rituals” contained in approximately two thousand ritual books,<sup>7</sup> and scholars at the Dongba Research Institute believe that ceremonies and sub-ceremonies add up to one thousand.<sup>8</sup>

Some Dongba rituals are fixed by the calendar—for example, the Sacrifice to Heaven—and others are performed according to necessity, such as healing rituals and funeral rites. Ceremonies may last a few hours or several days and take place in the daytime or through the night under torchlight. Juniper branches and incense sticks are lit to purify the ritual space and contribute to the ceremonial atmosphere. Indeed, one should not underestimate the importance of spectacle in Dongba efficacy. In the 1940s, Dongba ceremonies never failed to attract crowds of onlookers fascinated by the chanting, the dancing, the sword fighting, the incense burning, the beating of drums and ringing of bells, and the stories of fearful mythic battles and tragic romance.<sup>9</sup>

## Dongba beliefs and moral teachings

Since the Dongba religion had no standardized dogma, its cosmological interests must be gathered from its ritual corpus. To date, Joseph Rock's Na-khi English Encyclopedic Dictionary, a monumental work in two volumes, remains the most complete reference for scholars of the Dongba religion.<sup>10</sup> The second volume, published posthumously and compiled from Rock's notes, lists thousands of deities and ghosts and demons, their mythological stories, and the ceremonies in which they are encountered.

The Dongba belief system is essentially animistic. Unlike Bon or Buddhism, it has no elaborate philosophical or metaphysical dimension. It is focused on “this world”—the

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4.4  
Ceremonial instrument, conch-shell trumpet, fvsseimokua, decorated with auspicious symbols on brass.

Nothwestern Yunnan  
Province, China  
Shell, brass  
10 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 5 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 4 in.  
(25.8 x 13.9 x 10 cm)  
Courtesy of the Peabody  
Museum of Archaeology and  
Ethnology, Harvard University  
39-93-60/6019 (98770077)





4.5  
Ritual drum, dabbalar.  
Northwestern Yunnan  
Province, China  
Leather, wood  
19 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 3 3/4 in.  
(47 x 27 x 10 cm)  
Collection of the daughters  
of Quentin Roosevelt

natural world in its visible and invisible aspects, including people, animals, rocks, spirits, deities, and ghosts—and its moral teachings pertain to normative social rules, not to individual salvation. Its funeral rites and mythology reveal the high value placed on honor, valor, and the respect of ritual rules. Dongba mythology and cosmology are imbued with pervasive gender egalitarianism and a positive disposition toward qualities that are regarded as specifically feminine, such as kindness and intelligence, even when the latter is understood as cunning.<sup>11</sup> Sins, like killing people and wild animals, stealing, or marrying the wrong relative, are expressed as ritual taboos and ritual pollution. And although the Dongba religion does not altogether ignore individual responsibility, a great deal of anti-social behavior is believed to be caused by external elements—evil ghosts and demons—and is not clearly differentiated from other misfortunes such as illness or bad luck.

Like many animistic traditions, the Dongba religion holds that every aspect of nature is inhabited by spirit and that some natural features such as springs, rivers, mountains, caves, rocks, and trees are especially loaded with cosmic power. The most sacred Dongba springs and caves are in the region of Baidi. The Dongba priests perform rituals to propitiate heaven, the stars, the spirits of the mountains, and the gods of the house and of the hearth; to remove pollution; to obtain longevity and reproductive powers; to worship ancestors; to increase grain, herds, and wealth; to divine the future and cast horoscopes; to exorcize ghosts and evil spirits in order to heal people and animals as well as to end droughts and other disasters; and, finally, to preside over the transformation of departed souls.

## Funerals and concepts of souls

Dongba funeral ceremonies were once lengthy and complex affairs. Until the eighteenth century, the Naxi cremated their dead, and funerals were completed by a major ceremony performed during the eleventh month of the year, when bone remains were collected and buried. Dongba funerals reflected the society they served. There were ceremonies for Dongba priests, for victorious warriors, for courageous men and women, for men and women who had lived long lives (of more than sixty years), and so forth. There even was a



4.6

Crown (ka) worn by Dongba priests. The middle lobe depicts Dongba Shilo. From left to right, the deities are: Mee-bozisse, Dalamibbu (the Dongba equivalent of the Bon flaming tiger deity Tagla Membar), Dongba Shilo, Tuchi Yuma (the highest of the three hundred and sixty protective Yuma deities), and the Kiut'kiu (Garuda). Above each deity is the god Soyiwade.

Paint on cardboard

4 3/8 x 7 1/4 in. (11 x 18.5 cm)

Private Collection



funeral ceremony for dogs.<sup>12</sup> However, after their naturalization into the imperial polity in 1723, the Naxi adopted Chinese funeral rites, and by the 1930s, except in the more remote mountain regions, Naxi funerals were mostly conducted by Buddhist and Taoist priests. The Dongba priests still performed funerals for fellow priests and for people who had committed suicide, in particular for the illicit lovers who had committed ritual love suicide.<sup>13</sup>

During funeral ceremonies, the Dongba priests guide the souls of the dead along the Hei Zhi Pi, the Road of the Gods, which is represented in a painted scroll measuring one foot wide and up to forty feet long. The departed souls proceed through the various levels of hell—as the priests ensure that they avoid the tortures they may have merited by committing various sins during their lives—through to the human world, to the place of the Asuras, and finally to heaven.<sup>14</sup>

While the graphic depictions of hell featured in the Hei Zhi Pi offer an insight to traditional Naxi morality, Naxi funeral rites and attendant concepts of souls confirm that notions of the afterlife are vague and originate from several sources.<sup>15</sup> For example, during the funeral, the Road of the Gods is rolled out from the coffin in a northeastern direction because the Naxi not only believe that souls ascend to heaven but also that they return to the land of the ancestors. With the exception of the people of Ludian, who send their departed to a place west of Lijiang, the ancestral roads lead northeast, beyond present-day Muli to a mythical place.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, some Naxi say that humans have three souls, and others say that they have five.

Even the souls of relatives have a ghost aspect, and the funeral rites are at least as concerned with freeing the living from potential ghosts as they are with ensuring the well-being of the departed. Traditional concepts of souls stress social inclusion and exclusion: only Naxi souls can become ancestors and, at least in theory, only Naxi funeral rites can return departed Naxi souls to the ancestral land. This is why the adoption of Chinese funeral rites in 1723 is significant. When the Naxi buried their dead like the Han Chinese, their ancestors became Chinese.<sup>17</sup>



4.7  
Crown (ka) showing a high god (unidentified) in the center, a performing Dongba on the far left and the protective deity Tuchi Yuma on the right.  
  
Watercolor on heavy cardboard  
Each domed lobe measures 20 cm h., and 10 cm wide at widest point  
Collection of Dr. John M. Lundquist

## Cosmology and cosmography

**Art Publishers** Fundamental principles regarding the Dongba organization of the cosmos are perhaps best exemplified by the creation myth, told in the manuscript entitled Cobbertu ("The Descent of Humanity") and which begins thus:

A long, very long time ago, the sky was shaking, the gods Ddu and Sei had not yet appeared, the trees could walk and the stones could speak. The earth was trembling. The sky and the earth were not yet divided. First the three shadows of the sky and then the three shadows of the earth appeared.

The sun and moon had not yet emerged. First the three shadows of the sun and the moon appeared. The stars and the Cosmos had not yet emerged. First the three shadows of the stars and the Cosmos appeared. The mountains and the valleys had not been shaped. First the three shadows of the mountains and the valleys appeared. The waters and the canals had not been shaped. First the three shadows of the waters and the canals appeared.

Three good things made nine good things, nine made the body of the mother; truth and lies appeared, and then reality and void.

At first Truth and Reality made a transformation and the bright light of the sun appeared. The Sunlight made a transformation and the Bright Turquoise appeared. The Bright Turquoise made a transformation and the white crystal clear egg of Reality appeared. The egg of Reality made a transformation and the voice and breath of the one who could call appeared. The voice was good and the breath was good. The voice and breath made a transformation and the benevolent god Yigu'agu appeared.

At first Yigu'agu changed, a white egg appeared, the white egg changed and a white rooster appeared. No one had given the rooster a name, and so he took a name for himself. He called himself Eeyueema of the Ddu clan.

4.8

Crown (ka) showing the gods of the five directions: Nima-tusiggo (east); Yichimeemiggo (south); Meeneidiuliugvggo (center); Nimagvshuggo (west); Hogulojjiggo (north).

Such a crown is rarely seen in Lijiang and would be used at the funeral of a Dongba.

Northwestern Yunnan

Province, China

Papier-maché, paint

8 x 26  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 1/10 in.

(20.4 x 68 x 0.3 cm)

Courtesy of the Peabody

Museum of Archaeology and

Ethnology, Harvard University

39-93-60/6022 (98770083)



4.9

Funeral instrument, lamumeetvguliu. It is inserted into a metal spear and planted in front of the door of the deceased's house.

Northwestern Yunnan

Province, China

Wood

16  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 1  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  in.

(41.5 x 4.8 x 4.4 cm)

Courtesy of the Peabody

Museum of Archaeology and

Ethnology, Harvard University

39-93-60/6020 (98770079)



Eeeyueema laid nine pairs of white eggs. ...

Another generation passed. Truth and Illusion made a transformation and a black egg appeared. The black egg changed and a black stone appeared. A bad noise and a bad vapor appeared. The bad noise and the bad vapor changed and the evil god Yigudina appeared. Then Yigudina changed. A black egg appeared, the black egg changed and a black rooster appeared. No one had given the rooster a name and so he took a name for himself. He called himself Fuzi'aina of the Sei clan.<sup>18</sup>

These events are followed by the appearance and making of the various things of the universe and finally of the hero Cosseilee'ee, his six brothers, and his six sisters. Since there is no one else on the earth, according to the myth, the six brothers "cannot go to war and capture wives," and so they marry their sisters. Their incestuous relationships anger the gods, and a great flood appears and drowns the whole earth. Cosseilee'ee is the sole survivor.

When the waters recede, Cosseilee'ee searches the empty earth for a mate but there is no one. Desperately lonely and in want of begetting humanity, he decides to ascend to heaven to look for a wife just as the heavenly princess Coheibubami is descending to the earth to seek a mate. They meet at the place where black and white meet and return to heaven, where Coheibubami tries to hide her lover from her father, Zela Apu. When Apu discovers the unworthy upstart, he is furious. Pretending to agree to his daughter's choice, he devises a series of murderously impossible trials for the earthman to prove himself. But with the magical help of Coheibubami, Cosseilee'ee outwits his unwilling father-in-law and succeeds at every task. After milking a mother tiger, Cosseilee'ee finally obtains his bride and, with the blessing of the ill-tempered Apu, the couple returns to the earth via a golden rope. On the earth, they have three sons: the oldest speaks Tibetan, the second speaks Naxi, and the third speaks Bai (the Bai are the people of Dali, which is south of Lijiang), and each reveres his own gods.

We see in this story the dynamic of dual and opposing principles that rules the Dongba universe: shadow and light, black and white, night and day, earth and sky, sun and moon, good and evil, masculine and feminine, brothers and sisters, wife givers and wife takers, benevolent deities and their demon counterparts, earthly man and heavenly woman, and so forth. Dualism permeates Dongba religious thought on several levels: an oppositional level (for example, gods versus demons) that demands a degree of ritual violence; a complementary level (for example, day and night, or earth and sky), which cannot be bridged but creates the dynamics of time and space; and a complementary sexual dynamic, which is the movement of life itself and is embodied in the cosmic substances of nnu and o—semen and female emissions—and which Dongba He Jigui liked to explain as the "Naxi version of yang and yin."

## The spirit world

The Dongba spirit world is commensurate to the corpus of ceremonies. There are hundreds of ceremonies and subceremonies, hundreds of Dongba deities, and hundreds of evil spirits. However, Naxi religion is a vast domain and it is not a perfectly ordered and consistent system. At the apex of the Dongba pantheon are several deities: the Great Heaven or Meeludduzi, the father of humanity (that is, of the Naxi people), and three great gods and their counterparts—Soyiwade and his wife, Michohuamee, the god O'Per and his wife, Lochoyussomi, and the good god Yigu'agu, whom Rock called the First Cause, and his counterpart, Yigudina, the First Evil Cause. Other essential deities include the god Ddu and the goddess Sei, who embody the masculine and feminine principles; the deities and



4.10  
Coheibubami, the celestial princess of the Dongba creation myth, mother of the Naxi, Tibetan, and Bai people.

4.11  
Cosseilee'ee, the earthman, hero of the Dongba creation myth, father of the Naxi, Tibetan, and Bai people.



spirits associated with the five directions—north, east, south, west, and the center and their associated elements; the god stones and god trees; and Si, the god of life who is believed to reside in a basket that the Naxi hang on the walls of their houses.

A great number of Dongba deities are simply named in the course of ritual and nothing more is known about them. Others have relatively detailed biographies, and many are related to each other—as fathers, mothers, wives, husbands, paternal aunts, grandfathers, sons, and so on. Many Dongba deities also find counterparts in the Bon pantheon, some with their Tibetan names almost unchanged. First among these is Dongba Shilo, the founder of the Dongba religion, who is sTonpa Shenrab in the Bon tradition. However, the highest god, Soyiwade, does not appear to have a counterpart in Bon.<sup>19</sup>

Listed in Rock's Encyclopedic Dictionary are more than two hundred high gods (heiddiu), about one hundred gods (hei), and as many goddesses (heimi); countless demi-gods; personal gods (pula); tutelary winged spirits with bird heads called terko; three hundred sixty Yuma protective winged spirits (known as werma in the Bon tradition), who sport various animal heads; ancestral and celestial Dongba priests; serpent deities or Nagas (lee, lv, leemee, and si) who compose entire clans and tribes, cause illness and drought, but also grant fertility and medicines; mountain gods, including Saddo, the spirit of Lijiang's Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and the patron god of the Naxi people—and whom the Tibetans know as Satham, who fought with Gesar of Ling; and the gods of the many villages, rivers, valleys, trees, and so on. There are Dongba gods of victory, gods of the various grains, gods who rule over the animals, gods of the animals, animal gods, mothers and fathers of the natural elements, deities who help suppress the demons of suicide, gods who ensure conception, and so forth. In other words, there are gods and spirits for all eventualities of life.

And inevitably, there are evil spirits for all conceivable disasters. Rock lists several hundred demons and evil ghosts that fall in either one of four demon categories (zei, dder, lachou, dv). Many have animal heads—such as pig, chicken, horn, ox—and there are demon husbands and demon wives, demon daughters and demon sons, and so forth. All evil spirits have their specialist field of mischief: illness, ritual pollution, crop failure, drought, bankruptcy, rape, domestic arguments, dysentery, floods, suicide.

Beyond the zoomorphism of various spirits, the Dongba religion grants some animals mythological and symbolical significance in their own right—for example, the dragon, Garuda (Kiut'kiu), the rhinoceros, lion, tiger, ox, yak, horse, and many birds, including the cuckoo, the pheasant, and the peacock. Animals are associated with symbols of kingship (like the tiger, eagle, and rhinoceros), of domesticity (the yak), and of the wilderness (the snake), and their categorization contributes to the order of the universe. Thus, there are animals with claws (the tiger, the lion), animals with hooves (the yak, the horse), animals that fly and animals that walk, and so forth, which may also be attached to particular elements, compass points, colors, and kinship designations. The frog and the bat occupy a special place in Dongba lore. They are magical beings that belong to "in-between" categories: the frog is not a fish yet it is born in water, and the bat is not a bird but it dwells in the sky. Dongba cosmology grants the dog a special ritual signification. Eating the flesh of dogs (as well as that of frogs and horses) constitutes serious ritual pollution, and the Naxi even today enjoy distinguishing themselves from the Han by citing the traditional proverb, "The Han are dog eaters."



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4.12 a, b  
Details from an elaborate chart depicting Garuda. Here Garuda is not eating the snake, which is wrapped around the tree. The Tibetan inscription represents the letters of the Tibetan alphabet.

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China; 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Pigments on cloth  
25 3/4 x 18 1/2 in. (65.4 x 46.9 cm)  
Rubin Museum of Art  
C 2006.66.55  
Photograph Bruce M. White



## Time, space, and numerology

The Dongba religion often groups gods and demons in sets, reflecting cosmography and the magical power of numbers. There are five great regional gods and their five demon counterparts, five regional Dongba priests who ride five regional animals, five regional mountain and serpent spirits (Nagas), and five regional Garudas, all of which are connected to the five compass points. Also attached to the compass points are the gods of the five elements and their associated colors: wood/east/white, fire/south/green or blue, metal/west/black or red, water/north/yellow, and earth/center/multicolored. Then, there are the sub-directions of the northeast, southwest, southeast, and northwest. The northeast, as mentioned above, is also the point from where the Naxi originate and to which they return when they die.

Both space and time are expressed as numerical relations. The numbers 4, 5, and 8 correspond to the compass points and pertain to space. The numbers 7, 9, 10, 12, 36, and 360 pertain to time: 7 being the number of days in a lunar week, 9 the number of days in a solar week, 10 and 12 are the numbers of months associated with the solar year, 13 the number of months in a lunar year, 360 the number of days in a year, and so forth. Dongba Shilo has eighteen sisters and he resides in the eighteenth level of heaven, which is a Buddhist notion (Bon has thirteen levels). Shilo also has 360 disciples and his demon-wife commands an army of 360 evil ghosts. Dongba cosmology associates the number 9 with the masculine domain, mountains, and South, and the number 7 with the feminine domain, valleys, rivers, and North. Thus, seven goddesses opened the earth and nine gods opened the sky. In this scheme, the numbers 7 and 9 are not sequential but opposite.

Dongba time is sacred, mythical, and cyclical. The cycles are those of the agricultural year and of the lives of people and animals, but they also include the reincarnation of religious teachers and magical kings and the recurrence of natural and political events and disasters, the cosmic movement that Mircea Eliade calls the *Eterna Retorno*.<sup>20</sup>

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## Dongba books and their scripts

It is impossible to know how many Dongba books may have been found in Lijiang in the decades before the Communist revolution. Both Joseph Rock and Quentin Roosevelt—or rather the young Roosevelt's host James Andrews, the head of the Protestant Christian Mission in Lijiang—stressed the scarcity of these books, but this must be questioned. Rock and Roosevelt collected several thousand books between them, and there are more than twenty thousand Naxi manuscripts in libraries around the world. These can only represent a fraction of the Dongba books that were once found in Lijiang. According to He Pingzheng, a scholar-translator in Lijiang, there could have been as many as ten thousand manuscripts in any average Naxi village. There is no doubt that uncountable numbers of Dongba books were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

The great majority of Dongba manuscripts collected in the 1940s and held in museum collections are duplicates, and most are not dated. Many Dongba books were also produced by woodblock printing techniques. Dated manuscripts, meanwhile, are relatively recent, having been written in the Qing period (1644–1911) after 1703, and mostly after 1875.<sup>21</sup> There is one notable exception, however: a Naga manuscript owned by Rock that was dated the Seventh Cycle of the Water Rooster Year, which is 1573, 1393, or 1630, depending on whether one uses the Chinese, Tibetan, or Mongol dating system, respectively.<sup>22</sup> This early manuscript has been the subject of some controversy, for Anthony Jackson dismissed all three possible dates and argued that the Dongba tradition is at most two centuries old and

that it is either a devolved form of Bon or a Buddhist invention that reached its zenith in the late nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Neither of Jackson's propositions, however, is entirely credible. It is unlikely that between the 1870s and the 1920s—a span of a few decades, or within the course of one priest's lifetime—the Dongba religion could have accumulated hundreds of deities and associated mythologies, as well as books that had been already partially forgotten, or invented funeral ceremonies that were never performed. It is also doubtful that the Dongba tradition should have spread across the territories that belonged to the Naxi kingdom of the Ming period (1368–1644), including places like Muli, which were outside the jurisdiction of Lijiang by the early eighteenth century. In addition, many details found in the manuscripts bear witness to the Dongba tradition's past: the depiction of women's dress, objects and weapons, the names of ancient tribes and clans, and the organization of the Dongba religion itself. The presence of so many duplicate books may be explained by the fact that the Dongba priests copied their manuscripts to accumulate merit, following the practice of Tibetan Buddhist monks, and also to sell to common folk who acquired Dongba books as well as Buddhist and Taoist books for good fortune.<sup>24</sup> Since the great majority of Dongba books are not dated, the appearance of dated manuscripts after 1875 suggests a newly acquired practice rather than the beginning of the book tradition itself.

Traditionally, Dongba manuscripts were written on paper made from the bark of a local shrub (*wikstroemia lichiangensis*) or the bark of mulberry trees.<sup>25</sup> Dongba ceremonial books resemble Tibetan Buddhist books in that they are long and rectangular and are read horizontally from left to right; however, they may be wider and are usually stitched on the left side. Dongba divination books are wider and usually stitched at the top. Dongba divination techniques also seem derived from Chinese rather than Bon sources.<sup>26</sup>

The Dongba books are written in two scripts: a syllabic script called geba, which means "disciple," as it is said to have been taught to the disciples of Dongba Shilo, and the pictographic script which today is often simply called "Dongba script" and whose ancient name is *siulijiu*, or "wood record stone record." The geba shows similarities to the ancient Chinese characters found on oracle bones as well to a few classical Chinese characters.

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4.13  
Dongba manuscript, showing  
pictographs and the twelve  
zodiacal animals.  
  
Northwestern Lijiang Province,  
China  
Ink on paper  
3 ½ x 11 ¾ in. (9 x 29 cm)  
Private Collection





front



back

4.14  
Wooden printing block, Tibetan  
script with Naxi pictographs.  
  
Northwestern Yunnan  
Province, China  
Wood  
10 x 6 x 1 1/8 in.  
(25.3 x 15.4 x 2.9 cm)  
Courtesy of the Peabody  
Museum of Archaeology and  
Ethnology, Harvard University  
39-93-60/6044 (98770081)

Some geba symbols are also identical to the symbols found in the scripts of the Naxi's Yi neighbors. While the geba was used in secular contexts, the pictographic script is a purely religious script, and the great majority of Dongba books are written in pictographs. Pictographic books are also found all over the Naxi territory, while the much more rare geba books are found only in the southern region. Chinese scholars have established four stylistic schools of Dongba pictographic writing: Baisha (which is in the old political center of the Lijiang plain, near the town of Lijiang), Ludian, Baidi, and Baoshan.<sup>27</sup> According to He Zhiwu, the most sophisticated and the greatest number of pictographic manuscripts were produced in Baisha,<sup>28</sup> although the Dongba tradition holds that the pictographic script was first taught to the Dongba priests in Baidi.

## Reading the pictographic books

The pictographs may be used literally (in which a drawing of a tree signifies a tree), phonetically (in which a drawing of a tree represents the sound of the word "tree"), or in a rebus. Although the pictographs are a fully functional script, Dongba manuscripts are written as mnemonics: the priests memorize their ceremonies and use the pictographs to prompt their memory. And since there is no formal Dongba organization, priests are free to write, add, or change pictographic contents to serve their purposes and abilities, which results in many textual variations.<sup>29</sup> While most Dongba manuscripts contain degrees of variations, Dongba priests may still be able to read each other's books. However, they would not usually read from the books of a priest who was not a teacher or colleague. All manuscripts have titles, which identify ceremonies, and there are usually enough pictographs on a page for any priest to identify the parts of the ritual. Most texts are memorized, and if a priest should need to read another priest's manuscript—for example, to assist scholars in translating manuscripts from a library collection—he will simply substitute his own version. As long as the differences he encounters are not too extensive, the priest will also make sense of the variations.<sup>30</sup> If, however, a priest copied his teachers' books rather



than innovated with his own choice of pictographs, he will not be able to retrieve forgotten words where pictographs are missing and, over time, some knowledge can be lost. And a Dongba priest who lacks prior knowledge of a ceremony will find it impossible to recite from a manuscript.

It follows that Dongba texts are only partially accessible to noninitiates, even with the help of an excellent dictionary, which also maintains the secret, sacred character of the books. One consequence for scholars is that it is impossible to read or reconstruct a complete text from a given manuscript without the help of a priest. Rock took advantage of these textual variations by collecting hundreds of books for comparative analysis since words or names that are missing from one manuscript may appear in another. With the help of several Dongba priests, he was able to recover a great deal of information—including the names of many deities—that had been forgotten by individual priests.<sup>31</sup>

In Rock's time, the Dongba religion was in decline, and some priests were even willing to sell the bulk of their libraries and their ceremonial objects to travelers and collectors such as Li Lincan, Quentin Roosevelt, and Rock himself. But if the Dongba tradition had once been a significant force among the Naxi, what shape did this ancient religion take? Where had it come from, and what had caused its decline?

4.15  
Manuscript page showing  
demons with animal heads  
and geba script.

Northwestern Yunnan  
Province, China  
Ink on paper  
3 1/8 x 11 5/8 in.  
(8.8 x 29.5 cm)  
Private Collection

## Dongba Mysteries: theories and interpretations of Naxi history and religion

According to Chinese Marxist scholarship, the Dongba tradition is an example of the "primitive religion," or animism, found among tribal people around the world and not least among the people of China's ethnic peripheries. Marxist historical dialectics hold that societies progress through similar stages of development. In the political sphere, societies develop from tribalism to the slave societies of the antique world, to feudalism, to bourgeois capitalism, and ultimately to communism. In the gender sphere, societies move from





4.16  
Ritual banner (detail).  
(Cat. No. 7A)  
Collection of the daughters  
of Quentin Roosevelt

matriarchal to patriarchal systems and become gender egalitarian under communism. And in the religious sphere, systems of thought evolve from animism to organized and stratified religion, until they are replaced by science and atheism. In this perspective, China's ethnic minority cultures are the result of unequal development and unequal competition with the Han majority. Owing to prejudice and poor management during millennia of imperial administrations, minority ethnic groups retained customs and religions acquired from earlier tribal and feudal stages.

Chinese historians believe that Naxi society passed from the tribal stage to feudalism during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, under the rule of the Mu kings. From this perspective, the deepest strata of Dongba syncretism are explained as survivals of primitive animism, as ancient as Naxi tribalism, while other religious particularities—for example, Bon and Buddhist elements—are the result of social evolution and contact with more developed people such as Tibetans, Mongols, and the Han.

It is accepted historical knowledge that Naxi society was transformed from a tribal to a feudal polity in the Ming period, and it is reasonable to contend that Dongba animism either absorbed or grafted itself onto other religions through contacts with the more developed traditions of China and Tibet. However, the meta-historical approach of Marxist dialectics does not explain actual historical processes, such as the reasons why or the means by which the Dongba religion should claim the founder of Bon as its own founding deity from among the other religions that came to Lijiang. This is especially perplexing in light of the fact that, unlike the other religions, Bon has left no other trace of its presence among the Naxi aside from the Dongba tradition. Meanwhile, the Dongba manuscripts reveal that, at some former stage, the Dongba religion itself was significantly different from the tradition that Rock encountered in the 1920s.

## The Dongba tradition as it appears in the manuscripts

By the mid-twentieth century, the priests were known as Dongbas, but this name, which is derived from the Tibetan word stonpa meaning “teacher,” does not occur in the manuscripts. Conversely, the manuscripts depict ritual specialists no longer present in twentieth-century Lijiang. The manuscripts speak of male or female shamans called Sani, who are represented with loose hair and in a trance state.<sup>32</sup> In the twentieth century, however, the term *sani* had become an insult, referring to a magician or a shaman, while the polite term was *leebu*. Although a Dongba priest could also be a *leebu*, the *leebu* were associated with Saddo, the mountain patron god of the Naxi, not to Dongba Shilo, the Bon founder of the Dongba religion. The *leebu* had no books and could not read from the Dongba manuscripts. And yet the term *leebu* also occurs in the manuscripts: it is the title used by Dongba priests when they signed their names to some of their manuscripts, in particular those dedicated to the cults of the lee mountain spirits. In fact, *leebu* means “wife of the lee.” In twentieth-century Lijiang, however, not only did the *leebu* not have ritual books, but also the “wives of the lee” were all males.

The ritual specialists most commonly depicted in the Dongba manuscripts are the Bubbu and the Pa, a male/female pair. Rock transcribed “Bubbu” as “Bpö-mbö”—and it may well be that “Bubbu” is the Naxi version of “Bonpo” or “a follower of Bon.” But *bu* is a Naxi word that means “to chant.” The Pa is a female diviner who can see ghosts and gods. The Dongba manuscripts refer to the Bubbu as “the capable one” and the Pa as “the intelligent one.” By the twentieth century, however, the Bubbu had given way to the Dongba priest while the Pa had vanished altogether.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, in the twentieth century, the Dongba religion had no female ritual specialists at all. Meanwhile, the male-priest/female-diviner pair (Bubbu and Pa) has cognates in the Bimo and Sani partnership of the Naxi’s Yi neighbors, in the Mosuo Pu Daba and Pa Daba,<sup>34</sup> as well as in other Himalayan traditions and Mongolian shamanism. It is possible these shamanic pairs were also present in the ancient, pre-Buddhist religions of Tibet.



## Rock's theory: the Dongba religion is an ancient Bon tradition



4.17  
Pictographic depiction  
of the Pa, female diviner,  
the intelligent one.

4.18  
The Bubbu, the male priest,  
the capable one.

4.19  
The Sani, or shaman.

Joseph Rock believed that the Naxi's ancestors, the Qiang tribes, brought an ancient Bon tradition to Lijiang in the first century CE, when they migrated to Yunnan from northeastern Tibet. The archaeological record, however, confirms the settlement of various tribes in northern Yunnan in 24 CE from the south, from the region of present-day Dali.<sup>35</sup> Qiang tribes did settle in Lijiang but not before the third century. In fact, the Naxi trace their ethnic origins to several peoples—and to several layers of conquest, deportation, conscription, enslavement, serfdom, migration, and, not least, intermarriage. In the past two thousand years, frontier politics shifted what is today Lijiang under the political aegis of Tibet, the kingdom of Nanzhao, and China.<sup>36</sup> These broader geopolitical stakes occasioned intertribal conflict and migrations as local tribes and clans allied themselves with one side or the other. But local ambitions and opportunity also fueled intertribal warfare. Yunnan was first occupied by indigenous groups known as the Zuo, then by the Kunming and the Sui, Qiang tribes (among them the Jang), Wuman and Baiman, the Pu (a clan of Jang), the Mo-so, and the Mongols—whose descendants make up the Naxi nationality today but who can also be counted among the ancestors of the Mosuo, Pumi, Yi, Bai, and Lisu.<sup>37</sup>

The ancient Bon may have an old presence in Yunnan, if Bon is understood as the animistic and shamanistic practices that were part of a broad religious complex found from Central Asia to the Mongolian steppes—what R. A. Stein calls the “nameless religion” and what Chinese scholarship calls the “primitive religion.”<sup>38</sup> It is likely that such ritual traditions were also found among the Jang tribes who occupied Lijiang in the fifth century and those who conferred upon the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain the name of Satham, the Naxi Saddo. The problem, however, is that Rock established a core connection between the Dongba religion and the systematized, post-Buddhist Bon when he claimed that the Dongba patron deity, Dongba Shilo, was none other than ~~Stonpa Sherab Mibo~~. In addition, Rock backed this claim by calling on two events narrated in the Tibetan historical tradition. The first was the suppression of Bon by the Buddhist king Trhisong Detsen (740–786) who banished the Bonpos to the frontiers and to a place called Jang-Mo, the ancient name of the people of Lijiang.<sup>39</sup> The second was a Bon mission to the eastern frontier during the ninth century, when Bon was once again the official cult of the Tibetan royal house.<sup>40</sup>

In the ninth century, the region of Lijiang belonged to the Nanzhao kingdom, and this period is marked by the religious conflicts between Buddhists and traditional elements that took place there as well as in China and Tibet. In 836, the Nanzhao converted to Buddhism and banished the Taoists.<sup>41</sup> Between 836 and 842, religious wars brought the Tibetan kingdom to collapse, and in 845 Emperor Wu Zong implemented a massive repression of Buddhism and other foreign creeds in China. Thus, by the mid-ninth century, the Nanzhao kingdom was Buddhist, Tibet had largely reverted to its pre-Buddhist practices but was no longer a centralized empire, and China was Confucian.

The chronicles of the Lijiang kings indicate that about 836 (that is, when the Nanzhao banished the Taoists), tensions developed between the king of Nanzhao and the Lijiang overlord.<sup>42</sup> The Lijiang chiefs were long resistant to Buddhism. The first Chinese Buddhist temple was built in Lijiang during the fourteenth century, and Tibetan Buddhism did not become a significant force before the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Whatever religion(s) could be found in Lijiang in the ninth century, Buddhism was not among them.<sup>44</sup>

Rock never clarified the contradictions in his historical propositions. However, in the introduction to his *The Na-khi Naga Cult and Related Ceremonies*, he details the multilayered nature of the Dongba tradition, which he calls a “composite” religion with elements of Burmese Nat worship, Chinese Taoism, Tibetan Buddhism, and “Bon and an admixture of aboriginal Shamanism” at its core.<sup>45</sup>

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## The old Naxi kingdom and the Dongba religion

My research into the history of northwestern Yunnan suggested connections between the Dongba religion, the Bon tradition, and the feudal rulers of the Ming-dynasty Naxi kingdom. To demonstrate this, I will discuss two documents crucial to Naxi political and religious history: the two genealogical chronicles of the Mu family.

In 1516, the Naxi king Mu Gong compiled the first genealogical chronicle of his illustrious family, in which he provided the names of his ancestors and recorded their marriages, children, and political achievements, and said nothing of local religious practices. The chronicle, meanwhile, begins with several incomprehensible lines, which made no sense even to Mu Shu, a twentieth-century descendant of the royal family who showed the record to Rock.<sup>46</sup> This mysterious introduction is then followed by a list of twelve “legendary ancestors” as Rock called them and their wives, who also appear in the Dongba creation myth. Following them, is an ancestor named Yegunian, designated as the “First Generation,” who lived in the seventh century, when Lijiang was under the control of the Tang empire (618–906). Thus, Yegunian is the first “true” ancestor. The name Yegunian, however, is made up of two words meaning “old generation” and is not a real name. In fact, its historicity was sufficiently doubtful as to prompt the eighteenth-century king Mu Zhong to declare that the first real Mu ancestor was the next descendant in Mu Gong’s genealogy, Qiu Yang, who lived in 670 CE.<sup>47</sup> The remainder of this chronicle hovers between history, myth, and strange generational reckonings, as Mu Gong relates the marriages, military deeds, and political alliances of his ancestors and endows his forefathers with supernatural powers and their successions with unnatural generational gaps and equally strange dynastic categories (see the table, page 76/77: The ancestors of the first Mu chronicle).

In 1545, however, Mu Gong produced a second chronicle, prefaced by the celebrated Confucian scholar Yang Shen, in which the Naxi king claimed a much shorter genealogy originating from a Mongol ancestor called Yeye, who married the daughter of a local chief. And while this is likely to be closer to historical truth, there are also obvious discrepancies: firstly, Yeye means “grandfather” and is no more of a real name than Yegunian, and secondly, Mu Gong wrote that Yeye arrived in Lijiang in the twelfth century—more than one hundred years before the Mongol conquest.

Rock warned, “The records do not appear to be authentic.”<sup>48</sup> And yet, the chronicles were no doubt of great importance to the Mu descendants, who not only kept both documents until the twentieth century but also duly entered their own genealogical details into the first chronicle until the eighteenth century and into the second until the twentieth. Nonetheless, Rock solved the first mystery of the 1516 chronicle when he discovered that the incomprehensible introduction was a Chinese phonetic transcription of the opening lines of the Dongba creation myth in the Naxi language.<sup>49</sup> In other words, in 1516, Mu Gong had set the origin of his family within the Dongba creation story, to the beginning of the universe and the origin of the Naxi people. But Rock did not think that Dongba mythology was the key to some of the other mysteries of the genealogy.

## The ancient names of the Mu genealogy

The presence of Dongba mythology in the first Mu chronicle implies that it is a sacred genealogy that can be read on several levels: historical, political, and magical. And in light of Dongba magical reckonings, the first chronicle shows connections not only between the Naxi kings and the Dongba religion but also between the Naxi kings and the Tibetan tradition.



4.20

Yang Shen, the celebrated Confucian scholar, friend of Mu Gong, who added a preface to the second Mu chronicle.

Courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Institute

Literature: J. Rock 1947, p. 28, pl. 48.

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To begin, there is the name of the Naxi ruling family: Mu. Mu Gong writes that after the final defeat of the Mongols in Yunnan (1381), the Ming emperor granted Ah-ja Ah-de the surname Mu, in Chinese fashion. Thus, Ah-de became Mu De and all his descendants carry the family name Mu. Mu, however, is only a Chinese surname insofar as it functions like one: it consists of one syllable, it precedes the personal name, and it is passed down from father to son, unlike the names of the earlier Lijiang chiefs. As we can see in the table (page 76/77), before the Ming-dynasty Mu chiefs, the names consist of four syllables. In the first part of the genealogy, the first two syllables of a descendant's name are the same as the last two syllables of his father's name: Du-gu La-ju // La-ju Pu-meng // Pu-meng Pu-wang // Pu-wang La-wan, and so on. This patronymic linkage system was common among the ancient tribes of Yunnan, which prompted contemporary Chinese observers to remark, "The tribal people have no names or surnames."<sup>50</sup>

In the Mu genealogy, however, we also find four distinct name patterns corresponding to four political eras and four territorial conquests. The first pattern corresponds to the period of the Zuo-guo Zhao and Yue-xi Zhao (674–960; the word zhao means "kingdom"), when Lijiang has come under control of the Nanzhao.<sup>51</sup> The second pattern, where the names feature the particle Mou, corresponds to the Mo-so Zhao and to the Song period (960–1279). During this time, according to the Chinese historical record, the Pu tribes recovered their land.<sup>52</sup> The third pattern, in which the names begin with the particle Ah, corresponds to the Mongol conquest (1253–79) and the Mongol period (1279–1368). The fourth and last pattern, with the Mu surnames, begins with the Ming conquest of Yunnan

in 1381 and continues into the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). The names and patronymic chains listed under Zuo-guo Zhao and Yue-xi Zhao hold the key to unlocking the next set of mysteries in Mu Gong's genealogy and, with those, the connections between the Lijiang chiefs and Bon.

The patronymic linkage system was found among other Yunnanese tribal families before Chinese indirect rule. In the 1940s, Lo Ch'ang P'ei collected twelve such genealogies pertaining to ancient influential families; interestingly, all but two of these genealogies show lists of names composed of two or three syllables, not four.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the Mu genealogy is peculiar. Looking more closely at the early names, however, we find that the first and third particles—Yang, La, Pu, Xi, Mou<sup>54</sup>—occur in a pattern. In fact, these particles also correspond to former clan and tribal names of Lijiang and Yongning that are still remembered today although they no longer serve any political or ritual function.<sup>55</sup> And the solution to this riddle is that the early names of the Mu ancestors were modeled on two ancient traditions: Yunnanese, indicating father-son linkages, and Tibetan, whereby the name of the mother was placed before the name of the father—in short, each ancestor's name listed in the Tang period (618–906) indicates his mother's clan name, his father's personal name, his wife's clan name and his personal name—thus identifying maternal as well as paternal filiation. We can be quite sure of this because, aside from Qiu Yang's wife, the genealogy until the Mongol conquest indicates only the personal names of the women who married the Naxi chiefs. After the Mongol conquest, Mu Gong provides the names of the wives and the names of the wives' fathers. Thus, the particle Ah no longer indicates maternal or affinal links; it continues the former pattern in appearance only, and it is a hereditary paternal particle. The advantage of understanding how this works, and which no doubt made sense to the sixteenth-century king Mu Gong, is that these name patterns allow us to identify, firstly, the system of marriage alliances that held the ancient tribal kingdom together and, secondly, the marriage alliances that sealed each territorial conquest signaled at each of the so-called Zhao and also with the headings FIRST GENERATION and SECOND GENERATION. Thus, the name Mou-bao Ah-cong, which introduces the second generation and the new paternal particle, signals the marriage of a Mongol man to a woman of the Mou family—indeed, as told in Yeye's story—while the name Mu is none other than the Sinicized version of Mou, the clan name of the Mo-so chieftains, on their mothers' side.<sup>56</sup>

## The Mu chiefs and the ancient Bon

In Chinese, the name of the Mu kings is written with the character meaning "tree" (木), and it is a transcription of the Naxi word mee, which means "heaven" or "celestial." This prompted Rock and others to conclude that the Mu chiefs modeled themselves on the Celestial Emperors of China.<sup>57</sup> However, there is another possible celestial connection, from the Tibetan tradition. According to the Bon tradition, the name Mu (also spelled "dMu" in many sources) refers to a heavenly royal lineage and to the mythical rope by which the first kings of Tibet traveled between heaven and earth—such as the rope the hero Cosseilee'ee and the heavenly princess Coheibubami used in the Dongba creation story. In 1959, Rolf Stein perceived the connection between the Tibetan and Naxi traditions, but he dismissed it, being misled by Rock who read the Mu genealogy too literally and thus believed that Mu was a Chinese surname:

The religious character of these dmu is well known. They are connected to Heaven and to the Bonpos. ... The founder of Bon, indeed, is himself well connected in the genealogy of the Mu lineage, but again, the Mu are here divine characters who have



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## THE ANCESTORS OF THE FIRST MU CHRONICLE

(based on Joseph F. Rock, The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom of South-West China [Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1947])

### TWELVE MYTHICAL ANCESTORS

Mee-ssa Cu-cu

Cu-cu Cu-yu

Cu-yu Cu-diu

Diu-yu Diu-ze

Diu-ze Zi-ze

Zi-ze Co-ssei

Cosseilee'ee

[the hero who survived the flood,  
married the heavenly princess Coheibubami]

Lee-ee No-o

No-o Na-ba-pu

Pa-pu O

O Ge-lai

Ge-la Qiu

From the 5th to the 8th century Lijiang and its people are known to the Tibetans as Jang; the Jang pay tribute to the Tibetan kingdom.

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## FIRST GENERATION

Yegunian (618)

Lijiang is under the control of Tang-period China.

[Tang period in China 618–906](#)

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### Zuo-guo Zhao

Qiu-yang (674) married Mi-jun-xi-shu

Yang-yin Du-gu (713–741) married A-hui

Gu became the governor of Santien (Satham/Lijiang) and turned his allegiance to the Nanzhao kingdom.

Lijiang passes under the control of Nanzhao.

Du-gu La-ju (751) married A-yao

Ju acquired merit on behalf of Nanzhao.

La-ju Pu-meng (785) married Tie-nu

Meng was appointed by the Chinese emperor.

Pu-meng Pu-wang (787/795) married Qieqie-yululu

Wang betrayed Nanzhao, joined with the Chinese, and defeated the Tibetans.

Pu-Wang La-wan married Geyu Olvnnu

La-wan Xi-nei (806–820) married Han-nu

---

### Yue-xi Zhao

Xi-nei Xi-ge (827–835) married Pu-mi

The Nanzhao could not control Xi-nei Xi-ge, and thus left him to himself, and only kept him in restraint.

A period of religious wars in Tibet, Confucian repression of Buddhism and foreign creeds in China, and Buddhist repression of Taoism and other religions in Nanzhao.

Xi-ge La-tu (863) married Ge-nu

La-tu Ngue-jun (902) married Xian-lu

At this time in Dali, Zheng Mai-si killed the heir to the king of Nanzhao and the entire Meng family (800 persons). Then, he usurped the throne. Meanwhile, in Lijiang, the chief La-gu Ngue-jun had six sons who were named Mou-ju, Mou-dao, Mou-gu, Mou-dai, Mou-lai, and Mou-tong, who each became the chief of a clan.

[Song period in China begins 960 AD](#)

When Nanzhao falls, the Pu people (former Jang tribes) reconquer Lijiang.

Ngue-jun Mou-ju married Ju-zhong

Mou-ju Mou-xi (998–1022) married Jiao

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### Mo-so Zhao

Mou-xi Mou-cuo (1054–1055) married Yu-li

Mou-cuo Mou-luo (1110–1117) married La-mu

Mou-luo Mou-bao married Nu

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## FROM THE SECOND TO THE SIXTH GENERATION

[Mongol conquest of Yunnan and Song-period China 1253–1279; Yuan dynasty, 1279–1368](#)

Mou-bao Ah-cong (1253) married Qiu of the Xiantao family  
Mou-bao Ah-cong could read at the age of seven even though he had never been taught. When he had grown up, he learned to speak the languages of the different tribes and invented the local wenzi (literature/scripts). He also learned the languages of the birds and animals and it was believed that he possessed supernatural powers. Ah-cong prophesied that the Mongols would come and subdue the king of Dali. While Mou-bao Ah-cong was still alive, the different clans of Lijiang competed with each other for power, but afterward, they saw his wisdom, sincerity, and fame, and they recognized him as their supreme chief.

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## THIRD GENERATION

Ah-cong Ah-liang (?) married Yu-xian, daughter of Gan-luo Mu-tu

Ah-cong Ah-liang met the Mongols at Fengke and was thereupon appointed to rule over the tribes of Lijiang in 1276.

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## FOURTH GENERATION

Ah-liang Ah-hu (1340 or 1347) married Lamu daughter of He-hui He-mi

Ah-liang Ah-hu was appointed by the Mongol court to rule over the tribes of Lijiang, including Yongning, and Fengke.

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## FIFTH GENERATION

Ah-hu Ah-lie (1347) married Zhang-men Ah-jia, daughter of La-ba La-tu

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## SIXTH GENERATION

Ah-lie Ah-jia (1356) married Zhu-mu, daughter of the Mongol family Hu-yi Pu-du

Ming period in China 1368–1644

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## FROM THE SEVENTH TO THE FOURTEENTH GENERATION

Ah-jia Ah-de (1382) Mu De married She, daughter of He Lu-ge

Ah-jia Ah-de pledged his allegiance to the Ming emperor and fought against the Mongol troops. Ah-de requested the family name Mu from the Chinese emperor.

In Yunnan, the Ming armies finally defeat the Mongols in 1381.

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## EIGHTH GENERATION

Ah-de Ah-chu (1383–1426) Mu Chu married Ah-shi-sa daughter of Ah Xian

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## NINTH GENERATION

Ah-chu Ah-tu (1419–1433) Mu Tu married Zhi-fu, daughter of Gao Zhong

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## TENTH GENERATION

Ah-tu Ah-di (1434–1442) Mu Sen married Li, daughter of Ah Su

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## ELEVENTH GENERATION

Ah-di Ah-xi (1442–1485) Mu Qin married Shun, daughter of Gao

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## TWELFTH GENERATION

Ah-xi Ah-ya (1485–1502) Mu Tai married Gui, daughter of Ah

Mu Tai was born with supernatural powers and thus fulfilled a prophecy. Mou-bao Ah-cong had warned that he should be reborn eleven generations later. Mu Tai was Mou-bao Ah-cong's reincarnation.

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## THIRTEENTH GENERATION

Ah-ya Ah-qiu (1503–1526) Mu Ding married Xiang, daughter of Gao

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## FOURTEENTH GENERATION

Ah-qiu Ah-gong (1527–1553) Mu Gong married Meng, daughter of Feng

Mu Gong compiled the chronicles.

[After Mu Gong, the number of generations, names, titles, marriages, and biographical details of all the Naxi kings are duly entered up to Mu Zhong, who was deposed in 1723 by the Qing emperor and replaced by a Chinese magistrate. The first chronicle stops at this point, when the Naxi kingdom ends. The Mu descendants, however, updated their genealogical record until the twentieth century in the second chronicle.]

4.21

The Naxi King Mu Gong, who first compiled the genealogical chronicles of the Mu family. (Mu Kung)

Courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Institute  
Literature: J. Rock 1947, p. 27, pl. 24.



come from Heaven. ... The king of Jang (Lijiang Mo-so) is also the "lord of rMu" [sic] but... the only real element would be the name Mu which the Lijiang chiefs took from 1382. However, the name Mu is a Chinese surname and it seems that it has no connection with our dMus.<sup>58</sup>

And yet, the name Mu, even taken at face value, cannot simply mean "tree." This Mu is a dynastic and royal name, and it has ritual and symbolic significance. In the Dongba tradition, as in so many of the world's religious traditions, trees are mediators between earth and sky. The Naxi Mu refers to a divine tree and an axis mundi: it is the tree between heaven and earth. In other words, it is a version of the mythic Tibetan Mu.

## The Mu chiefs and the Bon of Shenrab Mibo

According to the Tibetologist Per Kvaerne, the royal ritual attached to the early Tibetan kings was at the core of the pre-Buddhist shamanistic Bon.<sup>59</sup> And the Bon tradition, indeed, holds that Shenrab Mibo, who was a native of Zhang Zhung in northwestern Tibet, was himself attached to a branch of the Mu lineage. Now, Stein writes that the Tibetan records also refer to a Zhang Zhung (Shenrab's country) situated on the eastern frontier,<sup>60</sup> and he suggests that at some stage Zhang Zhung, the ruling lineage, or members of the royal lineage may have been transferred to the east. Stein adds that the various Qiang tribes commonly took the name Mu/Mi/Me meaning "heaven," words that the Chinese translate as Mo and the Tibetans as Mu, and that we should not be surprised therefore to find a Zhang Zhung, heavenly Mu, and Bonpos among the Qiang of the Tibetan eastern frontier.<sup>61</sup>

Could there be also connections between the Mo-so, the Mu, Zhang Zhung, and the cult of Shenrab? Evidently, the names Mou, Mu, and Mo can all be associated with the Naxi Mu kings, their Mou ancestors, and the Mo-so kingdom. Furthermore, the Mu and the Mo-so are on the eastern borders of Tibet and are related to the Qiang tribes. The name Jang-Mo (the ancient name of the people of Satham) is associated with the eastern frontiers of Tibet, the banishment of the Bonpos in the eighth century, and the Bon mission of the ninth.

Naxi tradition stresses the tensions between the Dongba religion and Buddhism. Oral histories relate that Dongba Shilo originally lived in Lhasa and that he came to Lijiang after losing a series of contests to the Buddhists. The manuscript tradition tells a more prestigious but equivalent story: while Dongba Shilo dwelt in heaven, he struggled with the Buddhists and finally came to the earth to rescue its people and teach his disciples.<sup>62</sup> But these tensions, rather than relating to an original struggle between Bonpos and Buddhists, may speak for more recent tensions that could have occurred after the conversion of the chief Mu Zeng in the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, there may be more connections between the Mu ancestors prior to Mu Zeng and the Bon tradition. The first to carry the name Mu, Mu De, is the twenty-first descendant from Yegunian, but he is listed as the seventh generation. And not only is Mu De the seventh generation from Yegunian, he is also the seventh Ah on his Mongol paternal side, and the seventh Mou on his maternal side. This repeated occurrence of the number seven, especially where the Mou are concerned, possibly relates to the Bon tradition, which holds that the first seven kings of Tibet were celestial and inherited their position through their matriline.<sup>63</sup> In the Dongba tradition, seven is a feminine number and connected to maternal lines. There is also more to the Mou and their Dongba connections. Heralding the Song-period ancestors is the chief La-tu Ngue-jun, who had six sons—called Mou-ju, Mou-dao, Mou-gu, Mou-dai, Mou-lai, and Mou-tong—who each became the chief of a clan, even though not one of them is named as

# Art Publishers



4.22  
The Naxi King Mu Zeng, who  
converted to Buddhism  
in the 17th century.  
(Mu Tseng)  
  
Courtesy of Harvard-Yenching  
Institute  
Literature: J. Rock 1947, p. 33,  
pl. 29.

a descendant in the genealogy. Meanwhile, there are six chiefs who carry the particle Mou, and four of those carry it twice, indicating that they took wives who were from the clan of their mothers. In other words, the chiefs of the Mou clan married women of the Mou clan. Thus, Mu Gong not only established his deepest ancestral origins in the Dongba foundation myth; he also composed his genealogy as a mythic analogy. Whereas the myth relates that Cosseilee'ee had six brothers "who could not go to war or capture wives" and married their sisters, Mu Gong writes that, under the six Mou chiefs who married women of the Mou clan, the various tribes of Lijiang were no longer united—that is, they no longer inter-married.

Thus, incest mythology provides a model for the royal genealogy. As incest justified the mythic flood that brought about the descent of a new humanity, so the six Mou descendants made way for the second generation headed by Mou-bao Ah-cong—or rather, a second generation headed by a Mongol chief whose clan designation was Ah and whose marriage to a daughter of the Mou chief sealed the Mongol conquest. This exegesis of the first chronicle finds support in the version told by Mu Gong in his second chronicle, in which the Mongol Yeye married a local chief's daughter.<sup>64</sup>



When Mu Gong produced his second chronicle, however, he removed the twelve legendary ancestors as well as the opening lines of the Dongba creation myth, and he shortened his genealogy by several centuries, claiming his first paternal ancestor in the twelfth century Yeye. Mu Gong also removed the magical attributes of the chief Mou-bao Ah-cong; he said nothing of the invention of the local scripts and, furthermore, he changed his ancestor's name to Nian-bao Ah-cong. Rock believed that Mu Gong had simply made a mistake, as the characters for Nian (年) and Mou (牟) are similar.<sup>65</sup> This, however, is unlikely. The second chronicle was prefaced by Yang Shen, who provided a third version of the Mu genealogy, in which he restored all the ancestors prior to the Mongol conquest, as they are found in the 1516 chronicle, albeit with significant alterations. In Yang Shen's genealogy, all the four-syllable names now have only two syllables—Gu Ju, Ju Meng, Meng Wang, Wang Wan, Wan Nei, and so on—thus showing only the father-son linkages; some of the dates have been shifted, and the name Mou has been replaced by Mai (麥).<sup>66</sup>

Without a doubt, this second chronicle is a Confucianized revision of the first chronicle, in which Mu Gong and Yang Shen produced a purer patriline freed from the particles showing the maternal linkages that legitimated the old tribal system and from the numerical reckonings that enshrined the Mou successions in incest mythology. Yet, for all this Confucian uprightness, Mu Gong could not part entirely with his ancestors' mythic history, and so he wrote that his Mongol ancestor came to Lijiang upon a great torrent of water, and he still made Mu De the seventh descendant from Yeye.<sup>67</sup>

The genealogical chronicles of the Mu family confirm that in the twenty-nine years that separate his two records, Mu Gong negotiated two ideological discourses: the internal discourse of the magical Bon and the Confucian discourse of the imperial polity. In the mid-sixteenth century, Mu Gong began to speak the language of the Ming court more exclusively, and evidence of the presence of Bon among the Naxi's ancestors began to disappear from the written record. Four centuries later, it had disappeared from collective memory altogether.

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## Bon and the mystery of the Dongba books

If the chronicles of the Mu family establish connections between the Naxi royal house, the Dongba religion, and Bon, there is no more evidence of the presence of Bon in Lijiang, and it may be that the Dongba tradition is all there ever was to the Lijiang Bon. If so, Rock may be right: the Dongba religion is perhaps a survival of an ancient Bon—without temples or monasteries, attached to the royal cult and lineage heads, and primarily concerned with the funeral rites that returned the departed to the lands of the ancestors—but a Bon that nevertheless had knowledge of Shenrab Mibo. This would make the Dongba religion highly significant to the history of Tibetan religions. But without more research, we cannot be sure of this proposition. Indeed, beyond present-day Naxi territory, there exists an active Bon temple in Zuosuo, a former territory of the Mosuo chiefs of Yongning. Zuosuo became autonomous in the eighteenth century, after the Yongning chief and all his people converted to Gelugpa Buddhism; local records note that before their conversion, the Mosuo chiefs had adhered to the "Black Bon."<sup>68</sup> Both Zuosuo and Yongning belonged to Lijiang during the Mongol period. In other words, it is not impossible that a systematized Bon was once active in Lijiang and that it was suppressed or substantially reformed after Buddhism became influential, after the conversion of the king Mu Zeng. In this case, the Dongba tradition may be all that remains of these events and transformations.<sup>69</sup> But it is both interesting and important to note that in Zuosuo, where the Bon is still active, there are no Dongba priests but there are Daba priests, as among the Yongning Mosuo. The Daba

priests have no manuscripts and no pictographs; theirs is an oral tradition.<sup>70</sup> This is important because it makes the point that the Dongba religion and its manuscript tradition are entirely connected to the Naxi—and more precisely to the Naxi who today live in the territories that belonged to the Lijiang kings of the Ming dynasty.

But whether the Dongba religion is an early systematized Bon, a survival of a small Bon tradition, or all that remains of the suppressed Bon does not explain why the Dongba priests have books written in a pictographic script.

## On the origins of the Dongba manuscripts

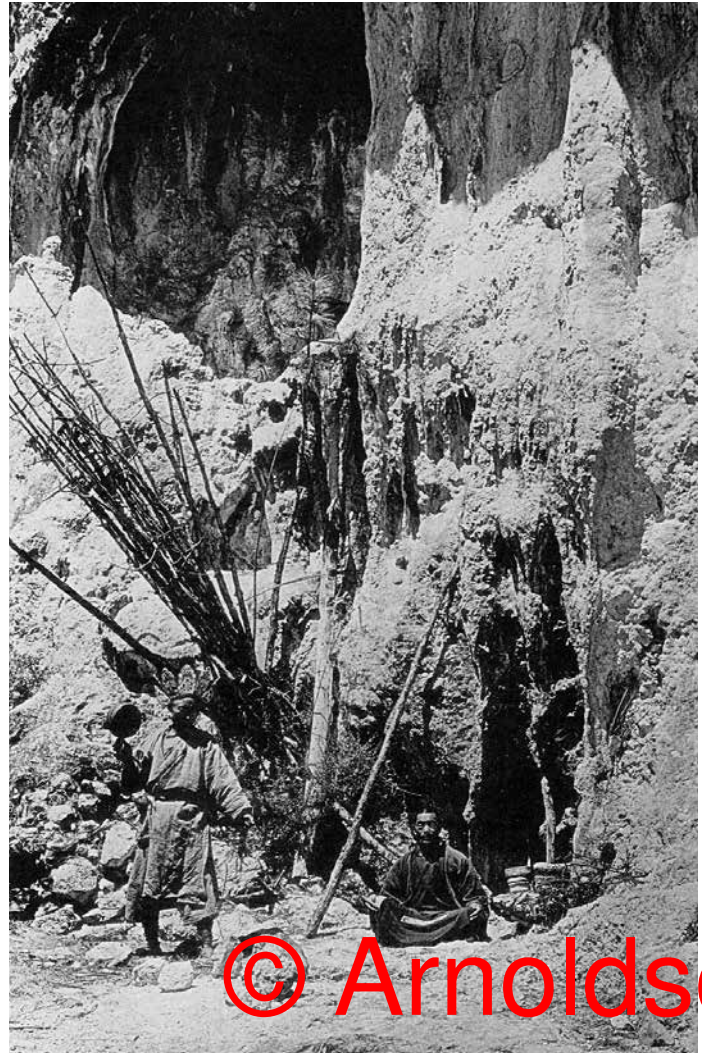
All scholars agree that the pictographs are a local invention. As Rock explained convincingly, the pictographs reflect so much of the Naxi's natural environment, fauna, and flora that they had to have been invented *in situ*. Most scholars also agree that the geba syllabic script and the pictographic script are not derived from each other. But scholars are divided on the question of the age of the scripts and their sequence: which of the two scripts came first, the syllabic geba or the pictographs?

From a Marxist evolutionary perspective, a syllabic script is necessarily more "advanced" than a pictographic script and therefore it has to be a later script. He Zhiwu and Fang Guoyu believed that the pictographs were invented during the Tang period (618–906), and that the geba script originated during the Song dynasty (960–1279), perhaps even at the time of Mou-bao Ah-cong, as the king Mu Gong wrote in his first chronicle. However, Fang and He did not believe that the record should be taken literally, and they were aware that Mu Gong had not specified the script his ancestor had invented, that he had simply written *wenzi*, which means "script" or "scripts."

Rock believed that the geba was an ancient Qiang script that the Naxi ancestors had brought with them from northeastern Tibet two thousand years ago. He was also convinced that these early ancestors had developed the pictographs after they had arrived in Lijiang. In other words, the pictographs were two millennia old. Like Fang and He, Rock dismissed any claim that Mou-bao Ah-cong had invented the local scripts as a mythological sham.<sup>71</sup> However, he did believe that Mu Gong had credited Mou-bao Ah-cong with the invention of the pictographs, not the geba.

More than two decades before Rock visited Lijiang, the Tibetologist Jacques Bacot had first suggested that the geba was perhaps an ancient Tibetan script and that it antedated the pictographs. Bacot was aware that the Tibetan tradition credits Buddhism for bringing writing to Tibet, but he was not convinced and pointed out that the Tibetans had long been surrounded by literate people.<sup>72</sup> Other scholars have suggested that the geba originates from the same matrix as the Yi script.<sup>73</sup> In fact, Rock also drew comparisons between the geba and the Yi scripts.<sup>74</sup>

There is nothing outlandish in the proposition that the Jang and the ancient Qiang tribes who came to Lijiang may have possessed a script based on ancient Chinese characters. According to Edwin Pulleyblank, the Qiang were already using oracle bones and Chinese characters three thousand years ago, although Pulleyblank also believes that the adoption of this ancient Chinese script probably went along with the adoption of (a degree of) Chinese culture.<sup>75</sup> However, given the ancestral connections between the Yi and the Nanzhao—as well as between the Yi, the Qiang, and the Naxi—it is just as possible that the geba is partly derived from the Yi scripts and that it was used or developed in Lijiang during the Tang dynasty under Nanzhao ritual and political control. As mentioned above, the geba books tend to contain divination rituals, and a number of those are derived from Chinese rather than Bon sources.



4.23  
(left) The 13th-century ancestor  
Mou-bao Ah-cong, who is  
credited with the invention  
of the local script.  
(Mou-pao A-tsung)

Courtesy of Harvard-Yenching  
Institute  
Literature: J. Rock 1947,  
p.38, pl. 12.

4.24  
(right) The sacred Shilo  
cave at Baidi.  
(The Sacred Grotto Shi-lo  
Ne-k'o)

Courtesy of Harvard-Yenching  
Institute  
Literature: J. Rock 1947,  
p. 40, pl. 140.

## The distribution of the manuscripts and its implications for Naxi history

Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu did in fact discover evidence of Mou-bao Ah-cong's writing, in a Ming-dynasty document in which it is described as unreadable fanzi, "western barbarian script." Fang and He concluded that Mou-bao Ah-cong used the syllabic script.<sup>76</sup> If we suppose that this "western barbarian script" was a Naxi script, rather than a Tibetan, Bai, or Yi script, then Fang and He are no doubt correct, for the pictographs are pictures and they may not readily elicit the word zi, which means "character." But if Fang and He are right, then the evolutionary theory becomes untenable. The geba and the pictographs are both usable scripts, and the priests who write in geba can also write and read the pictographs. If the geba was already used in the thirteenth century, it had seven centuries to compete with and replace the pictographs. The duration of seven centuries, however, argues that the pictographs prevailed over the geba.

If we look at the geographical distribution of the two Dongba scripts, we find the pictographs in all the Naxi territories that were conquered by the Mu kings during the Ming period while the geba is found in Lijiang, Judian, and Weixi—in other words, the



older tribal territories held by the Nanzhao between the eighth and the tenth centuries. Quentin Roosevelt made an interesting proposition about the Naxi scripts. Asking why the Naxi should have two scripts in the first place, he suggested that those belonged to different people: conquerors and conquered. The conquerors would have retained not only their own script but also adopted the script of the people they had overrun for practical reasons, to save the expense of teaching the conquered a brand new script.<sup>77</sup> Roosevelt concluded that since the Naxi (that is, the Mo-so tribes) had invaded from the north, they must have brought one of their scripts from this region while the other writing system would have originated in the south.<sup>78</sup>

However, as I mentioned earlier, not only the geba but also the best examples of the pictographic script were found in the southern regions and especially in Baisha, which was the political center of the Mu kings.<sup>79</sup> Thus, the geographical distribution of the two types of manuscripts, rather than reflecting an original conquest or migration from the north, suggests that the pictographic script may have spread from the political center. A plausible explanation, or at least a plausible hypothesis, is that the pictographs played a role in unifying the territories conquered by the Mu during the Ming period. This fits with the account by Mu Gong, that his shaman ancestor Mou-bao Ah-cong united the tribes of Lijiang and invented the local script(s), and with Rock's reading that Mu Gong intended his contemporaries or his posterity to believe that his Song-dynasty ancestor had invented not the geba but the pictographs.

But according to the Dongba tradition, the pictographic script was not so much invented as it was taught to the Dongba priests by a reincarnation of Dongba Shilo, who resided not in the palace or the temples of the Mu kings but in a sacred cave in the region of Baidi. It is important to note that Baidi came under Mu control quite late in the Ming period, after centuries of warfare against recalcitrant tribes who fiercely resisted the imposition of feudal rule and its attendant benefits: taxes, corvée, and military conscription. And the Mu kings made claims not only to Baidi but also to the sacred Shilo cave. In 1554 Mu Gong's son, Mu Gao, visited this cave, where he left a dedication to Shili, a traveling monk who had resided there five hundred years earlier, in 1054.<sup>80</sup> In other words, Mu Gao made Shili's visit to the cave concurrent to the foundation of the Mo-so kingdom itself.<sup>81</sup>

## The Dongba manuscripts, rock art, and the expansion of the Mu kingdom

As mentioned earlier, the pictographic script is called sijiulujiu, or "wood record, stone record." Chinese scholars versed in Marxist evolutionary theory (like Fang and He) explained that this is so because the priests drew a tree where they meant to write "tree" and a stone where they meant to write "stone." But if this explanation confirmed the presumed "primitive" character of the Dongba religion, it ignored the fact that a script used for purely religious purposes (as the pictographic script was) may be imbued with cosmic power. Indeed, the sacred character of the pictographic script is announced in the very words "wood" and "stone," which are fundamental Dongba cosmic substances.

In 1990 I was looking at the cover photograph of a New Scientist magazine that featured rock art when I was suddenly struck by the representation of the sun, for it was identical to the Dongba pictograph. And once I had seen it, I reproached myself for not having thought of it sooner because this sun symbol is found in rock art around the world. Another thought occurred to me: could "wood record, stone record" refer to a tradition of rock and bark painting, as practiced by so many of the world's tribal people from Australia to the Americas? Could the pictographs have originated from rock art?



4.25

The king Mu Gao, son of Mu Gong, who first compiled the genealogical chronicles. Mu Gao dedicated the Shilo cave at Baidi. (Mu Kao)

Courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Institute

Literature: J. Rock 1947, p. 39, pl. 25.



I was encouraged by the work of Hans Jansen, who had compared Naxi pictographs to Ojibwa bark and rock paintings in 1970,<sup>82</sup> but if my hypothesis was to move beyond speculation, there had to be rock art in the Naxi region. Unknown to me, rock paintings had been brought to the attention of relevant government authorities in 1988. No one I had spoken with knew anything about this, and I had not come across any publication on the subject.

Then, in 1991, I learned from He Limin that he had discovered several rock art sites in the area of the Tiger Leaping Gorge, and in the following years, many more sites were found.<sup>83</sup> On the basis of stylistic comparison, He Limin and Deng Zhengchi (an archaeologist who also discovered and documented rock art in northwestern Yunnan) are now convinced that the pictographs were derived from this local rock art.<sup>84</sup>

The discovery of rock paintings in the mountain regions of Lijiang confirmed for Chinese scholars that the Dongba pictographs are a local and authentic Naxi production. But how did rock art metamorphose into a pictographic script used in books inspired by the Tibetan tradition? And how did rock art evolve into a script carrying Dongba and also Bon rituals?

The rock art found in the Lijiang region is very ancient, with current dating evaluations suggesting the mid-to-late Holocene or even earlier, and therefore it is much older than the migrations of the Jang or the Mo-so.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, these ancient rock paintings

have no ritual connection to the Dongba religion. The rupture between rock art and Dongba ritual implies that the people who invented the pictographic script were not the original artists or custodians of these rock paintings. He Limin also notes this. He thus proposes that at an earlier stage of their history, when the Naxi still lived and hunted in the mountain regions, they were inspired by the rock paintings to invent pictographs, which they possibly wrote on strips of bark. Nevertheless, He Limin also argues that the transition from rock paintings to pictographs was not a straightforward process.<sup>86</sup>

Another piece of the puzzle lies in explaining why the Naxi Dongba priests should be the only ritual practitioners in the region to have pictographic books. Rock art is found on both sides of the Jinshajiang, but the Mosuo Daba priests have no books and no script, whether they are attached to Bonpo or Buddhist territories.<sup>87</sup> In fact, until the mid-Ming dynasty, the mountain regions where the rock art is found belonged not to the Mu kings but to independent tribes which the Yuan (1279–1368) and Ming (1368–1644) historical records call by various names, including Yeman (“Wild Barbarians”), Luman, Lisu, and Ye Lisu (“Wild Lisu”). The Lisu, we are told, were another type of Lolo, that is, people who are counted today as among the ancestors of the present-day Yi.<sup>88</sup>

From the perspective of the Dongba tradition, these mountain regions are the domain of the thousands of lv, lee, si, leemee, their kings, their relatives, and their numerous clans (Si, Ni, Ddu, Lu, etc.)—the dragons and serpent spirits that Rock calls Nagas. The Dongba priests hold yearly rituals as well as occasional ceremonies to these spirits of the wilderness to compensate them from the injury done to them by farming and to obtain from them fertility and medicine.

There are significant correspondences between the lv, lee, si, and leemee mountain spirits of the Dongba manuscripts and the Lisu and Luman tribes, who are found in the historical records of the Yuan and Ming periods and whom the Naxi call Leesi. Both live in the same territories, their names are so phonetically close as to be virtually identical,<sup>89</sup> and their occupations and livelihoods are almost identical: the lee, si, and leemee spirits grant medicine and fertility; the Leesi and Luman tribes collected native forest products, medicinal herbs, musk, and aphrodisiacs, which they paid as tax after they had submitted to the Mu kings.<sup>90</sup> These correspondences between the tribal people and the local spirits must be understood in light of the Dongba beliefs in ghosts and ancestor worship. Only souls of those within the tribe become ancestors; all other souls are ghosts. In other words, the mountain people were known as Leesi and Luman because the ghosts of their ancestors and the ghosts they were bound to become were indistinguishable from the local lee, si, and leemee spirits.<sup>91</sup>

The Mu chronicles relate many battles between the soldiers of the Mu kings and the mountain people. In particular, Mu Gong wrote that in 1487, during the reign of his ancestor Mu Tai, a terrible battle took place at the mouth of the Haba River in the region of Zhongdian, and eighty-seven people were captured and decapitated.<sup>92</sup> Did the Mu bury their enemies at the foot of mountain cliffs as offerings to local spirits, as the Mongols did?<sup>93</sup> Mu Gong gives no such details, but at the mouth of the Haba River, every year on the eighth day of the second lunar month, the Dongba priests propitiated the lee and si—in a ritual that Rock described as “pure Bon” and identical to the Bon rituals dedicated to Naga cults.<sup>94</sup> However, this Naxi Naga ritual cult (as Rock called it) is written not in a Tibetan script but in the pictographs.

Meanwhile, Naxi oral tradition (as opposed to Dongba tradition) relates that the pictographic script was invented by a holy man named Ah-mi Ci-da who hid in the cave at Baidi for safety from both the Mu kings and the Tibetans. While Ah-mi was in the cave, his sacred books turned to stone, and since he no longer had Tibetan books, he began to study the Dongba books. Then, he learned the language of the birds, and he began to use the pictographic script.<sup>95</sup> As noted earlier, Dongba tradition holds that the pictographs



4.26  
Pictograph depicting a lv,  
dragon or Naga spirit.

were first taught to the priests by a reincarnation of Dongba Shilo, who had resided in the cave. And Mu Gong, whose son Mu Gao dedicated the cave to Shili, had written in the divine family record that Mu Tai, the victor of the Haba River battle, was the reincarnation of Mou-bao Ah-cong and that he too could read the script(s) his shaman ancestor had invented.<sup>96</sup>

In a world made meaningful by the belief in spirits and ancestral souls, territory cannot just be taken; it must be transacted because the ancestors grant health and fertility, and the ghosts of outsiders create mischief and illness. When a conqueror marries a local chief's daughter, as Yeye did in the second Mu chronicle, he obtains the transfer of the land, its inhabitants, and its ancestors, and, as the Naxi creation myth relates, a new "humanity" emerges—in historical terms, a new tribal polity headed by the new chief. The union of the conqueror to the chief's daughter thus replays the marriage of the hero Cosseilee'ee and the heavenly princess Coheibubami told in the Dongba creation story, which is central to the Sacrifice to Heaven ritual. But when violence alone achieves the conquest of territory and where there is no king and therefore no king's daughter to be wed, the ancestors cannot be transferred and the ghosts of defeated foes must be pacified. And here, it was not to heaven that the ancient Naxi sacrificed but to the leemee, lee, and si spirits. Meanwhile, the Dongba manuscripts relate that the lee spirits and the Naxi people have the same father but different mothers. And it is written in the Bon canon that "fertile fields and good harvests, extant of royal power and the spread of dominion, although some half (of such effects) is obtained by previous action, the other half comes from the powerful lords of the soil, so you must attend to the lords of the soil, the serpents and the furies."<sup>97</sup> In the hills of Lijiang, the serpents and the furies, the local spirits and the ancestral ghosts of the tribal inhabitants, were plainly visible: they were painted on the rock surfaces of the cliffs and caves.

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## Concluding remarks on the pictographs and feudal dominion

Today, the townspeople of Lijiang say that "the real Naxi" live in Baidi.<sup>98</sup> Yet, according to Chinese statistics, in the late twentieth century the Naxi represented fifty-five percent of the population of Baidi; and the people who identified themselves as Naxi reported that their ancestors had moved from Lijiang about twenty generations ago, or sometime between 1530 and 1580.<sup>99</sup>

The northern regions of Baidi and Zhongdian were crucial to the political expansion of the Mu kingdom, and the Mu encountered the fiercest resistance in these parts. Baidi, with its natural springs and limestone terraces and caves, was surely an important sacred site to the tribal people, and Zhongdian is Lijiang's gateway to Tibet. Securing these regions had economic advantages for the Mu kings, for the main trade routes between Tibet and China passed through Lijiang.<sup>100</sup> But it was also a matter of military necessity. The Mu kingdom was a buffer zone on the western frontier of the Chinese empire, where it kept in check a resurgent Tibetan state strengthened by Mongol military power. The Mu also needed to suppress possible raids by Kham and other tribal clans largely independent of the Tibetan political center. From Zhongdian, the Mu expanded their dominion well into Tibetan territory, and by the seventeenth century, with reinforcements of great numbers of Han peasant-soldiers, they had established a powerful, highly cultured, cosmopolitan, and multi-religious kingdom that extended to Muli and reached as far north as Litang.<sup>101</sup> Mu military incursions in the mountain regions of Baidi and Zhongdian began in the Mongol period and intensified during the Ming. Mu Gong relates the capture of each village, the submission of the tribal chiefs, the imposition of tribute, the number of men taken for

corvée, the executions of so-called “brigands” and Tibetans, and the destruction, subsequent reconstruction, and repopulation of entire villages.<sup>102</sup> Mu Gong and his son Mu Gao waged several campaigns in the region of Zhongdian until 1553, the year Mu Gong died. And the following year, Mu Gao dedicated the cave to Shili in Baidi.<sup>103</sup>

The proposition that the pictographic tradition was established among the Naxi within the context of the ritual transfer of territory, from the defeated tribal people in the mountain peripheries to the Naxi chiefs of Lijiang, does not solve all the mysteries surrounding the Naxi pictographic script, nor does it preclude several scenarios. The hill people may have had a ritual connection to the rock paintings even if they had not produced them, as proposed by He Limin. Today Naxi shepherds make spontaneous offerings to the painted spirits when they pass through these areas.<sup>104</sup> Even if they were not the original custodians, the hill tribes may have been inspired by the rock paintings to produce pictographs, not unlike the Micmaq and the Ojibway people did in North America. Such indigenous practices could have provided the Naxi Bonpos with the inspiration to invent the pictographic books—just as, in 1600, the Catholic priest Chrétien Le Clerc adapted indigenous pictographs into a script to teach Christianity to the Micmaq people—which echoes Quentin Roosevelt’s thoughts on the pre-existence of a script among the conquered people.<sup>105</sup>

The pictographic script may also antedate the Ming dynasty.<sup>106</sup> From the perspective of stylistic and content analysis, the Mongol period made some impact on pictographic representations: for example, the name of the chief given in the manuscripts is Ka (or Khan) and the Ka and the Mongols are depicted in a similar manner.<sup>107</sup> Thus, it may be that the pictographs originated in the Mongol period and perhaps even with the shaman-chief Mou-bao Ah-cong, although it should be remembered that Mongol cultural influence in Yunnan lasted well into the fifteenth century,<sup>108</sup> which is to say, into the time of Mu Tai, Mou-bao Ah-cong’s reincarnation.

It is certainly tempting to credit Mu Tai’s generation with the invention of the pictographic books, rather than Mou-bao Ah-cong’s, but even if the pictographs were invented before the Ming period, there is little reason to doubt that this script served Mu territorial expansion among the mountain tribes. The Naxi kings conquered by force and they ruled by ritual. In the territories of the defeated tribes, pictographs embodied something that the geba script did not: they contained the substance of the leemee and lee and si, the guardian spirits of the land and the ancestral souls of those who had preceded the Naxi, the spirits who granted or withheld life-giving water, health, wealth, and fertility.

## Art Publishers



4.27  
Pictographic depiction of the emperor, or ka (khan).



4.28  
Pictographic depiction of a Mongol.



## Conclusion

Today, the Dongba religion is changing, but this is not the first time that the Naxi tradition must adapt to circumstances. The Bon ritual of the old Naxi kingdom may have been transformed into the Dongba tradition sometime after the conversion of the king Mu Zeng to Buddhism in the seventeenth century. Scholars have tended to blame the Confucian magistrates who replaced the Mu chiefs for the disappearance of the former shamanic pair, the Bubbu and Pa—but the female diviners also disappeared from the Mosuo Daba, and the Mosuo did not adopt Confucianism but Gelugpa Buddhism. In Lijiang, as in Yongning, not only were the Pa removed from the rituals but the word bu also disappeared. In Lijiang, bu was replaced by dongba, after the Tibetan word for teacher (stonpa), and in Yongning by daba. After the naturalization of the Naxi kingdom into the imperial administration in 1723, the Dongba religion was further displaced by Confucianism and the Buddhist and Taoist cults of the Han migrants. But the Dongba religion also held its ground. No longer in charge of the funeral rites, the Dongba priests remained the guardians of the strictest marriage rules, which ensured that Naxi girls married Naxi boys rather than the Han immigrants who settled in Lijiang in increasing numbers, for only the Dongba priests could perform the suicide funeral rites for the lovers who broke betrothal arrangements. And the Dongba priests copied their books by the hundreds, innovated with new iconographic and artistic representations, and even began dating their manuscripts.

Since its rehabilitation in the mid-1990s, the Dongba religion has acquired a new and remarkably extensive life. Especially in the last ten years, there has been an explosion of Dongba interests: Dongba art, Dongba dance, and not least studies of so-called “Dongba culture”—the latter falling under the new field of “Naxiology” with institutes and associations in Lijiang, Kunming, and Beijing and ties to institutions in various parts of the world. The palace of the Mu family has been reconstructed and is now open to the public as a museum, as is Joseph Rock’s former residence. Several training programs have been established to train young Dongba priests,<sup>109</sup> and even school children are taught to read pictographs, albeit on a Chinese model.<sup>110</sup> The Dongba tradition has also acquired new philosophical callings. Proscribed by the Communist authorities over four decades as a superstition and primitive animism, the Dongba religion is now perceived as ancient Naxi wisdom, with an inherent concern for environmental protection.<sup>111</sup> And last, but not least, the Dongba religion has acquired significant commercial value. Millions of tourists visit Lijiang every year, and while commercialization has boosted local interest in the old tradition, it has also brought new developments—new costumes, new dances, new art, more egalitarian gender codes, and the secularization of the Dongba pictographs—some with dubious results. But Dongba tradition is once again at the core of Naxi identity, a place it has not occupied for centuries. For the moment, the future belongs to it.

## NOTES

- 1 There are several perspectives on Bon and the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet: that a shamanistic Bon preceded Buddhism; that the pre-Buddhist religion cannot be called Bon; that Bon was always a form of Buddhism; that Bon plagiarized Buddhism, and that Tibetan Buddhism plagiarized Bon. Thus, Helmut Hoffman dates the beginning of Bon systematization (the Bon of Shenrab Mibo) to the eighth century, and Per Kvaerne to the tenth and eleventh, while Christopher Beckwith argues that Bon was always a sect of Buddhism. See the Bon bibliographies available online, by Dan Martin (<https://sites.google.com/site/tibetological/bon-bibliography>; accessed October 26, 2010) and by Kurt Schaeffer, David Germano, Ben Deitle, and Jed Verity (<https://colab.itc.virginia.edu/access/wiki/site/881b357c-7a1a-49ce-80b5-009e07d50d63/bon%20bibliography.html>; accessed October 26, 2010).
- 2 See He Limin's essay and my interview with Yang Fuquan in this volume.
- 3 Christine Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study of the Ancient Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland: Naxi and Mosuo* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003), 117; Jean Siguret, trans., *Territoires et populations des confins du Yunnan* (Beiping: Henri Vetch, 1937), 45–49.
- 4 Unless indicated, the data provided in this section, such as the names of gods and demons, are obtained from the work of Joseph Rock, from fieldwork, and from consultation with Dongba priests and Naxi scholars in China. In particular, a great deal of the discussion is owed to classes and conversation with the late He Zhiwu, a star student of the Lijiang Dongba historian Pang Guoyu, who was himself an outstanding cultural and intellectual figure in post-revolution Lijiang and in Naxi studies.
- 5 It may be that the term became derogatory after the conversion of the Mu chiefs to Buddhism in the sixteenth century. The Sani may be a woman and, indeed, the word sanime (the feminine form of sani) is especially despised. All female ritual offices were purged from the Dongba religion at some point in its history.
- 6 Anthony Jackson, *Na-khi Religion* (La Hague: Mouton, 1979).
- 7 Joseph F. Rock, *The Zhima Funeral Ceremony of the Na-khi of Southwestern China*, *Studia Instituti Anthropos* 9 (Vienna-Modling: St. Gabriel's Mission Press, 1955).
- 8 In fact, scholars at the Dongba Research Institute in Lijiang have now translated about one thousand ritual texts. See my interview with Yang Fuquan in this volume.
- 9 Peter Goullart, *Forgotten Kingdom* (London: John Murray, 1957); Joseph F. Rock, *The Romance of Ka-ma-gyu-mi-gkyi*, *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 39 (Hanoi: L'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1939); see also He Zhonghua's essay in this volume.
- 10 Joseph F. Rock, *A Na-khi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1963, 1972).
- 11 See He Zhonghua's essay in this volume.
- 12 Rock, *The Zhima Funeral Ceremony*, 4, 5.
- 13 See He Zhonghua in this volume; and Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 269–362.
- 14 See the Hei Zhi Pi in this volume, Cat. No. 29.
- 15 See also Joseph F. Rock, *The Life and Culture of the Na-khi Tribe of the China-Tibet Borderland* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1963).
- 16 Christine Mathieu, "Mosuo Daba Religious Specialists," in Naxi and Moso Ethnography: Kin, Rites, Pictographs, ed. Michael Oppitz and Elisabeth Hsu, 221 (Zürich: Völkerkundemuseum Zürich, 1998).
- 17 Although the Naxi adopted so many Han customs that they appeared indistinguishable from the Chinese to Jacques Bacot, they nonetheless resisted Han assimilation through various means—foremost with a strict rule of arranged marriage, which kept Naxi women for Naxi men and which was buttressed by the mandatory suicide of illicit lovers; see Jacques Bacot, *Les Mo-so* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1913), 10; see also chapter 7 in Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, and He Zhonghua's essay in this volume. The marriage rule also had the effect of assimilating the Han immigrants into the Naxi, with the result that the Chinese magistrate Wang Tuzhui, who visited Lijiang in the 1930s, decried that in Lijiang, rather than civilizing the Naxi, the Han had turned into barbarians. See Siguret, *Territoires et populations*, 42–43.
- 18 Translated in collaboration with He Jiangyu. The complete text of the creation myth appears in Christine Mathieu, "Lost Kingdom and Forgotten Tribes" (PhD diss., Murdoch University, Australia, 1997).
- 19 Rock, *The Zhima Funeral Ceremony*.
- 20 Eliade is one of the most important scholars in the field of the history of religion.
- 21 This date marks the final and brutal end of the Muslim Rebellion (1856–1873), a separatist movement against Manchu rule and that spread through the entire province of Yunnan and its ethnic groups, including the Naxi in Lijiang.
- 22 Anthony Jackson, "Kinship, Suicide and Pictographs among the Na-khi," *Ethnos* 36 (1971): 78–92; Anthony Jackson and Pan Anshi, "The Authors of Naxi Ritual Texts" in Oppitz and Hsu, *Naxi and Moso Ethnography*; Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 160–61.
- 23 Jackson, *Na-khi Religion*; Jackson and Pan, "The Authors of Naxi Ritual Texts" in Oppitz and Hsu, *Naxi and Moso Ethnography*.
- 24 See He Limin's essay in this volume and Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 147.
- 25 Rock, *The Life and Culture of the Na-khi Tribe*, 43–44.
- 26 Jackson and Pan, "The Authors of Naxi Ritual Texts" in Oppitz and Hsu, *Naxi and Moso Ethnography*.
- 27 He Zhiwu and Guo Dalie, "Dongbajiao de Paixi He Xianzhuang" [Schools and current state of the Dongba religion], in *Collected Papers About Dongba Culture*, ed. Guo Dalie and Yang Shiguang (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1985).
- 28 He and Guo, "Dongbajiao de Paixi He Xianzhuang."
- 29 See also Alexis Michaud's essay in this volume.
- 30 Dongba He Jigui, in a personal communication with the author, and confirmed by Dongba He Limin.
- 31 Rock, *The Zhima Funeral Ceremony*, x–xi.
- 32 The loose hair helps in communicating with the world beyond.
- 33 See also He Zhonghua's essay in this volume.
- 34 See the essay by Lamu Gatusa in this volume; Mathieu, "Mosuo Daba Religious Specialists" in Oppitz and Hsu, *Naxi and Moso Ethnography*.
- 35 Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 367.
- 36 "Nanzhao" means "southern kingdom." It was established in 738. At the height of its powers in the ninth century, it extended into Burma to the west, Laos to the south, and Sichuan to the north and included present-day Lijiang. The Nanzhao was overthrown in 902 and several decades later it was replaced by the kingdom of Dali, which fell to the Mongols in 1253. Nanzhao state ritual was a mix of shamanism and Taoism, but Chinese Buddhism and Indian Buddhism had significant presences as well. Chinese Buddhism became the official religion of Nanzhao in the 830's and other religions were expelled at that time.
- 37 Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, chapter 9.
- 38 Rolf A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972), 191; Per Kvaerne, *The Bon Religion of Tibet* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), 10.
- 39 Rock, *The Zhima Funeral Ceremony*, 4; Helmut Hoffman, *The Religions of Tibet* (London: Allen and Unwin 1956), 96.
- 40 Hoffman, *The Religions of Tibet*, 96; Guo, "Lun Naxizu Dongba Jiao Yu Zangzu Ben Jiao Guanxi" [On the Naxi Dongba and its relation to the Tibetan Bon] (internal publication, Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, Kunming, 1993).
- 41 Chen Lufan, ed., *Whence Came the Thai Race?* (Yunnan: Yunnan Guoji Wenhua Chubanshe, 1990), 226–27.
- 42 Joseph F. Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom of South-West China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), 90.
- 43 Karl Debreczeny, "Dabaojigong and the Regional Tradition of Ming Sino-Tibetan Painting in the Kingdom of Lijiang," in *Buddhism between Tibet and China*, ed. Matthew Kapstein (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2009).
- 44 During the ninth century, the official ritual of Lijiang may have been modeled on the pre-Buddhist official ritual of Nanzhao, a mixture of Taoism and shamanistic practices to which the Bimo religion of the present-day Yi people appears related. In 794, King Yimuxun of Nanzhao had consecrated the mountain of Satham as Nanzhao's sacred northern peak according to Taoist ritual and renamed it Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. See Camille Sainson, trans., *Nan-tchao Ye-Che: Histoire particulière de Nan-tchao* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1909), 48; Chen Lufan, *Whence Came the Thai Race?*, 200–01.
- 45 Joseph F. Rock, *The Na-khi Naga Cult and Related Ceremonies* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1952), 1: 5.
- 46 Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, 68–69.
- 47 Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, 70. In fact, Mu Gong meant to signal Yegunian as a former dynasty of the Yang clan (the Naxi pronounce

- "Yang" as "Ye"). About the various ancestors of the Mu genealogy, including Yegunian, Yeye, Yang-yi Du-gu, the twelve mythical ancestors, and the history of Lijiang and the tribes and larger powers that conquered it, see Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, chapters 2 and 9 in particular.
- 48 Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, 87.
  - 49 Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*.
  - 50 Lo Ch'ang-p'ei, "The Genealogical Patronymic Linkage System of the Tibeto-Burman Speaking Tribes," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 8 (1945): 349–63; Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, 64.
  - 51 The Zuo Guo was conquered by the Chinese emperor Han Wudi in 109 BCE in order to secure the southern Silk Road to India. The Yue-xi and Mo-so Zhao were tribal kingdoms defeated by Nanzhao in the eighth century. The Yue-xi and Mo-so Zhao never included Lijiang, and obviously none of the dates Mu Gong attributes to them in his chronicle corresponds to the historical dates of these kingdoms. The presence of these Zhao in the Mu genealogy is another mystery, but each of them—even the legendary list of the twelve mythical ancestors (the Chinese historical record gives Mee-za Cucu [Meng Cucu] as a chief of the Qiang)—marks a change of political control brought about by tribal warfare involving the larger powers of Tibet, Nanzhao, and China, and each change was sealed with a marriage alliance with the defeated chief and the adoption of the ritual of the conqueror. In politico-ritual terms, the Mu's genealogy, being a divine document, must encompass and include all preceding ancestors. Mu Gong thus seeks his ancestry as far back as the Zuoguo, the tribes described by the Chinese historian Sima Qian (145–135 BCE), a thousand years before his Mo-so ancestors arrived. For details of the political and ethnic history of the region, see Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, chapters 2, 3, and especially 9.
  - 52 Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, 64.
  - 53 Lo, "The Genealogical Patronymic Linkage System"; Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 53–54.
  - 54 The name Mou is also transcribed as Ma and Mai in some of the Chinese records and given as Mei in the Dongba manuscripts, and its pictographic representation is a tree, just as Mu is written in Chinese with the character for "tree." Mu, Ma, Mai, Mo, and Mou are all possible Chinese transcriptions of Mu and all are interchangeable. See Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 74–75.
  - 55 Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 76.
  - 56 Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 51–96, 108, 109.
  - 57 See Charles F. McKhann, "Fleshing Out the Bones" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1992), 389.
  - 58 Rolf A. Stein, *Les tribus anciennes des marches sino-tibétaines* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1959), 51–52. My translation from the original French.
  - 59 Kvaerne, *The Bon Religion of Tibet*.
  - 60 This may seem far-fetched, but Stein has grounds to take the record seriously. In Tibet and China, as in many parts of the world, the same place names may refer to several locations. The Tibetan and Chinese historical records also speak of places that were duplicated at opposite compass points; for example, according to the Tang history, there was a Western and an Eastern Country of Women on either side of Tibet (see Stein, *Les tribus anciennes des marches sino-tibétaines*, 28–31; also Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, chapter 9). In addition, in China, places were named and renamed according to political needs and the movements of various people. The difficulty for historians lies in the fact that chroniclers may use former or latter names without taking into account their historical specificity, as when we speak today of Burma rather than Mynamar, or when I use the word "Lijiang" (which dates to the foundation of the town of Lijiang in the Yuan dynasty [1279–1368]) to speak of so-called "Naxi" territories in the Tang dynasty (618–906). During the Tang dynasty, incidentally, the Chinese knew of two Indias: one was where the country actually is and the other in the region of Yunnan Province. See Paul Pelliot, *Deux Itinéraires de la Chine en Inde à la fin du VII<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 4 (Hanoi: L'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1904), 161.
  - 61 Stein, *Les tribus anciennes des marches sino-tibétaines*, 25.
  - 62 Lin Xiangxiao, "Dingba Shilo de Shidai Kao" [An inquiry into the life and contemporaries of Dingba Shilo], *Lijiang Zhiyan* 6, no.11 (1989): 98; Joseph F. Rock, *Studies in Na-khi Literature*, *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 3 (Hanoi: L'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1937).
  - 63 Sarat Shandra Das, *Contributions on the Religion and History of Tibet* (New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House, 1970), 28.
  - 64 This reading is also quite close to the Chinese historical record, which relates that the Mo-so chiefs who resisted the Mongols were executed while the chief Mai Zhong (Mou-bao Ah-cong) submitted and was spared (Naxizu Jian Shi [Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1963], 6).
  - 65 Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, 86.
  - 66 Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 66–67.
  - 67 Given that the Ming had only just beaten the Mongols in 1381 after a protracted war and uncountable casualties, Mu De had a political interest in stressing the maternal, native aspect of his ancestral name and underplaying his Mongol connections, but a patriline is the only legitimate line of descent from a Confucian point of view. When Mu Gong produced his second chronicle, he restituted his patriline and his Mongol ancestry, but he nevertheless took care to distance himself from the Mongol conquest by situating Yeye more than one century before the arrival of Kublai Khan's forces in Yunnan. Naxi oral tradition, meanwhile, maintains that either Mou-bao Ah-cong or his son Ah-cong Ah-liang was the son of Kublai Khan. The descendants of the Mosuo feudal lords, who were related to the Mu and were granted hereditary rule over Yongning by the Ming emperor, claim even today that they are descended from one of Kublai Khan's officers. But the Mosuo chiefs converted to Gelugpa Buddhism in the eighteenth century after the Mongols had established the Gelugpa over the Tibetan theocracy.
  - 68 Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, 356.
  - 69 Note that there are differing points of view on this issue. For example, Lin Xiangxiao has argued that it was the Nyingma-pa Buddhist sect that displaced the Bon in Lijiang (Lin Xiangxiao, "Dingba Shilo de Shidai Kao": 100–101).
  - 70 See Lamu Gatusa's essay in this volume.
  - 71 Rock, *The Life and Culture of the Na-khi*, xx.
  - 72 Bacot, *Les Mo-so*, 66–67.
  - 73 Pan Anshi, in Oppitz and Hsu, *Naxi and Moso Ethnography*.
  - 74 Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, 91.
  - 75 Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "The Chinese and their Neighbors in Prehistoric and Early Historic Times," in *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*, ed. David N. Keightley, 421 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
  - 76 Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1981), 52–53; He Zhiwu, "Naxizu de Gu Wenzi He Dongba Jing Leibie" [On a classification of the Naxi Dongba scripts and manuscripts], in Guo and Yang, *Collected Papers About Dongba Culture*, 157.
  - 77 Quentin Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study of the Naxi People: Their History, Religion and Art" (honors thesis, Harvard College, 1941), 60.
  - 78 Roosevelt, "A Preliminary Study of the Naxi People," 60–61. Li Lincan also believed that the Naxi had brought their pictographs from the north and that the geba was invented in the southern region at a later date (Li Lincan, "Lun Mo-sozu Xiangxing Wenzi De Fayuan Di" [On the origins of the Mo-so pictographs], in Guo and Yang, *Collected Papers About Dongba Culture*).
  - 79 He and Guo, *Dongba wenzi de jiaji He Xiangzhuang*, in Guo and Yang, *Collected Papers About Dongba Culture*.
  - 80 Fang and He, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters*.
  - 81 1054 is a date of enormous cosmic significance: it is the date attributed to the death of the great Buddhist saint and teacher Atisha, but it is also the year a supernova burned for twenty-three days, a phenomenon recorded by Chinese, Japanese, and North American astrologers. Obviously, Mu Gong is stacking his ancestors' cosmic connections, and the date should not be taken too literally.
  - 82 Hans Jansen, *Sign, Symbol and Script* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970).
  - 83 Paul S. C. Taçon and others, "Naturalism, Nature and Questions of Style in Jinsha River Rock Art, Northwest Yunnan, China," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 20, no. 1 (2010): 67–86.
  - 84 Taçon and others, "Naturalism, Nature and Questions of Style," 71.
  - 85 Taçon and others, "Naturalism, Nature and Questions of Style," 78.
  - 86 He Limin, "Dongba Wen Yuan Yu Jinshajiang Yan Hua" [The origins of Naxi pictographs and the rock art of the Jinshajiang], in *Naxi Xue Lunji* [Collected essays in Naxi studies], 162–76 (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshi, 2010).
  - 87 Some Daba priests are not altogether without a script: in Muli, the priests use thirty-six pictographs for divination purposes. The Mosuo also use a few abstract symbols when they build

houses, marking each log to indicate to which row it belongs as well as its orientation. In 2009, Lamu Gatusa communicated to me that pictographic manuscripts that the Dongba priests cannot understand have been discovered in the archives of the Yunnan Provincial Museum. Research into these manuscripts is pending. Given the cultural, historical, and geographical connections between the Naxi and the Mosuo, there is no doubt that the Daba priests did not have books because their political elite (Buddhist monks and feudal lords) did not wish it.

88 You Zhong, "Yuan Ming Qing Shiqi de Naxizu he Lisuzu" [Naxi and Lisu nationalities during the Yuan, Ming and Qing], *Yunnan Shehui Kexue* 3 (1986): 61–65; Lisuzu Jianshi, 1983; Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 200–01.

89 There can be a tone differential between the syllable "si" in the word meaning "spirit," which is expressed as [si]4 (fourth tone), and the "si" in the tribal name Leesi, which may be expressed as [si]1 (first tone) or [si]4 (fourth tone).

90 Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*. In the mid-sixteenth century, Mu Gong's Confucian friend Yang Shen composed a famous book entitled *Nanzhao Ye Shi* (Unofficial History of Nanzhao) in which he wrote at length about the ethnic people of the "wild regions" of Yunnan. Yang Shen names dozens of strange species of people who live outside the "civilized" political centers—who eat bees and rats, copulate with monkeys, speak like birds, and nest in trees or live in holes in the ground. He mentions a branch of the Pu (the same people that the Mo-so chased from Lijiang) whom he calls the Di Yang Gui ("Di Yang Ghosts") and writes most interestingly, that they used wood and stone to make their magic. For more details on cultural relativism in Ming-dynasty Yunnan, see Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 201–02. Today, on the other side of the Jinshajiang river, in the region of Labai where the old Daba religion barely survives, the Mosuo hold that the most dangerous of all ghosts are the Daji ghosts; see Lamu Gatusa's essay in this volume. The Daba Daji, like many of the Dongba demons and Nagas, constitute a whole clan of ghosts. But the Daji are also a real clan of the Yi (Nuosu), who live in the mountains beyond Labai. Here, we find an ethnographic example of the type of politico-religious beliefs I ascribe to the Naxi of Ming-dynasty Lijiang. If the Daji ghosts in the spirit world cause the worst illnesses, the Daji in real life raided the Mosuo, stole their children, food

crops, and animals, and burned a great deal of what they left behind; this is from my fieldwork notes. For confirmation of devastating raids by the Yi on the Mosuo regions in the Republican period, see Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*. For more on Daba concepts of ghosts, see the article by Lamu Gatusa in this volume, and Mathieu, "Mosuo Daba Religious Specialists," in Oppitz and Hsu, *Naxi and Moso Ethnography*.

91 Among these mountain people were not only Lolo but also possibly remnant groups of Jang and aboriginal people who had been pushed into the hills to find refuge from intertribal and religious conflicts and invasions. There are several references in the Dongba manuscript tradition as well as in the Mosuo oral tradition about various peoples taking to the hills to find refuge. See Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 371.

92 Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, 111.

93 See V.A. Riazanovskii, *Customary Law of the Mongol Tribes* (Harbin: Artistic Printing House, 1929), 36–37.

94 Joseph F. Rock, *The Na-khi Naga Cult*, passim; Dong Shaoyu and Lei Hong'an, "Naxizu Dongba Jiao Diaocha" [Research in the Naxi Dongba religions], in *Yunnan Minzu Minsu he Zongjiao Diaocha* [Research in the religions and folklore of the Yunnanese people], 1985.

95 Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, 190–91.

96 Interested readers may refer to Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*, pages 179–226, where I have provided many other ethnographic, ritual, and historical details to link the Naga cults, the hill tribes, the expansion of the Mu territories, rock art, and the pictographs—including a Mosuo Daba version of the Naxi Naga cults, the Remugubv, which tells the other side of the story, of the tribal people who were defeated by the soldiers of the feudal lords.

97 David L. Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon* (Boulder: Prajna Press, 1980), 12, 199.

98 From my fieldwork notes. Interestingly, Bacot, who visited Lijiang at the turn of the twentieth century, also noted this (see Bacot, *Les Mo-so*, 6).

99 Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha [Research into the social history of the Naxi nationality], vol. 2 (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1986), 21.

100 Debreczeny, "Dabaojigong and the Regional Tradition," 101.

101 Importantly, the interest of the Mu kings in

Tibetan Buddhism antedates the conversion of Mu Zeng in the seventeenth century. Karl Debreczeny, who has documented the temple art of Lijiang, notes the growing influence of Tibetan Buddhist motifs in the mural productions of Lijiang in the second half of the sixteenth century as well as the personal interest of the Mu chiefs in the Karmapa and Gelugpa Buddhist traditions of Tibet. Before this period, temple and palace art in Lijiang was executed exclusively in the Chinese style. Debreczeny also suggests that the push to build temples in Lijiang may have been politically motivated: to gain prestige with the Tibetan communities the Naxi kings were colonizing and to attract influential Buddhist hierarchs into their realm (see Debreczeny, "Dabaojigong and the Regional Tradition"). According to Debreczeny and other scholars, there is no sign of Bon in the temple murals of Lijiang. In other words, there would be no indication that the sixteenth-century Mu kings had any interest in Bon if it were not for their first chronicle and Mu Gao's dedication to Shili at the cave in Baidi.

102 Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*; Lisuzu Jianshi [Brief history of the Lisu nationality] (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1983), 16–19; Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha, 21–22.

103 The Mu kingdom would never be entirely free from tribal rebellion, feuds, raids and brigandage. Even the Buddhist and Celestial Mu Zeng waged war in the hills and executed rebels (see Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*).

104 Taçon and others, "Naturalism, Nature and Questions of Style."

105 A colophon attached to the first chronicle states that the Buddhist king Mu Zeng had many "Tibetan Buddhist books" printed to teach the tribal people on the frontier (see Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, 160). It is quite possible that these Tibetan Buddhist books were actually Dongba books.

106 See Alexis Michaud's essay in this volume.

107 Rock, *The Life and Culture of the Na-khi Tribe*, xx.

108 Walther Helligs, *The Religions of Mongolia* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 20–21.

109 See my interview with Yang Fuquan in this volume.

110 See Alexis Michaud's essay in this volume.

111 See my interview with Yang Fuquan in this volume.



# Pictographs and the Language of Naxi Rituals

Alexis Michaud (米可)

## Introduction

In the field of Sino-Tibetan studies, there are few languages with a long-standing written tradition. Among these, the Naxi pictographic tradition encapsulates unique information about the Naxi and their language and holds special promise for research. The language of the Naxi rituals raises a range of issues, such as: How old are the characters of the Naxi script? What is the origin of the seemingly strange words and turns of phrase found in the rituals? To answer these questions is difficult. The philological study of the Naxi tradition is greatly complicated by the fact that Naxi books were passed from one generation to the next as mnemonic summaries of the rituals rather than complete transcriptions, unlike Tibetan or Chinese texts. The absence of standardization of Naxi texts allowed the Naxi priests some freedom when copying books; this resulted in great diversification.

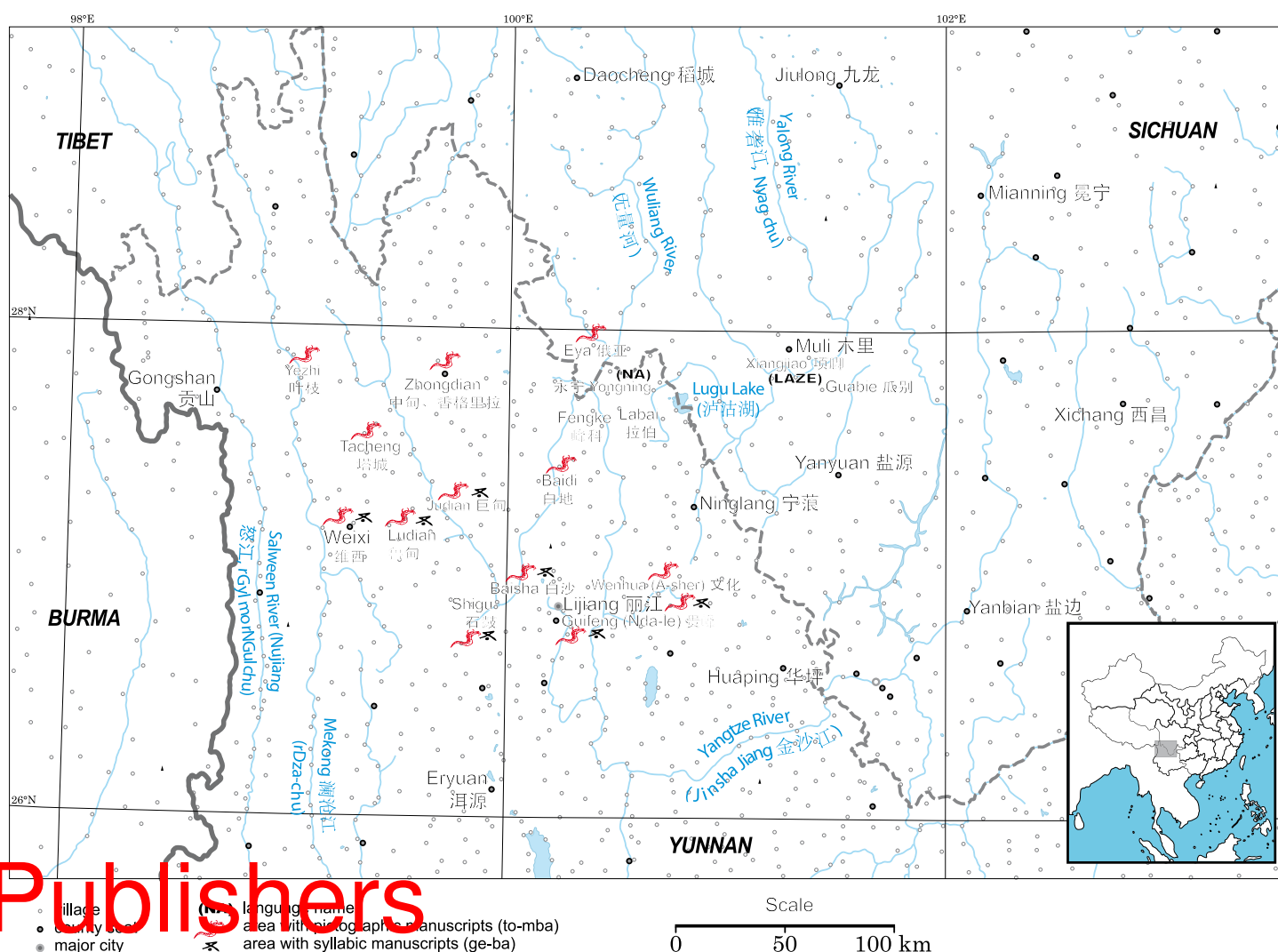
The field of linguistics can contribute some evidence and provide some tools to address these complex topics. The approach adopted here consists in looking at the Naxi facts in the light of a comparison between several dialects of the Naxi language and, beyond Naxi proper, a comparison with other Sino-Tibetan languages that are closely related to Naxi.

Naxi is the largest and best-described language of the Naish branch of Sino-Tibetan languages. Two other languages of this branch, spoken in areas that do not have pictographs, will be mentioned: Na and Laze, spoken in Yongning and Muli, respectively (these two language names are printed in capital letters on the map, page 93). The analysis of detailed examples reveals how this comparative work sheds light on seemingly obscure aspects of the language used in the Naxi rituals.

## Naxi books and the Naxi language

The language of the Naxi rituals is close to the ordinary language, what is known as colloquial Naxi. This is due to the fact that, strictly speaking, there was no clergy among the Naxi: the practitioners of the Naxi religion, the Naxi priests, did not constitute a separate social class.<sup>1</sup> Monks at a Tibetan Buddhist monastery learned written Tibetan and performed rituals in Tibetan, irrespective of their native language; by contrast, Naxi priests did not need to study another language in order to learn the rituals, although they did need to learn by rote some proper names, such as those of mythological creatures, and some unusual terms and turns of phrase. This means that research into the language of the rituals can build on the research being done on colloquial Naxi and vice versa.

Anthropologists and linguists have a common interest in transcribing large amounts of texts. The transcription of oral renderings of Naxi texts has been a concern of researchers ever since these texts came under scholarly scrutiny at the turn of the twentieth cen-



ture. As a result, philological and linguistic work progressed hand in hand, sometimes as a coordinated effort, such as when the linguist Chang K'un (张琨) worked out the system of Naxi sounds to devise a transcription method for recording the pronunciation of Naxi characters.<sup>2</sup> The dictionaries by Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu and by Joseph Rock constitute important lexicographic references as well as importance resources to understand the Naxi writing systems: the pictographic system—called /to-mba/ in Naxi (hereafter to-mba) and Dongba (东巴) in Chinese—and the syllabic system.<sup>3</sup>

To this day, annotated editions of Naxi ritual texts actually constitute the largest available translated corpora in Naxi. In addition to collections such as that by Fu Maoji, which predate the official definition of a transcription for so-called 'Standard Naxi' in the 1980s, there now exists a massive, one-hundred-volume edition of annotated and translated pictographic manuscripts.<sup>4</sup>

However, anthropologists and linguists diverge in the amount of attention that they pay to fine details in pronunciation. To the linguist, these details provide crucial hints about the history of the language and the rituals. But first, some essential notions about the Naxi language should be mentioned.

Like all of the world's languages, Naxi has various dialects. The city of Lijiang can be considered the center of the Naxi-speaking area; in Chinese scholarship, its dialect is called 'Standard Naxi.' As one moves away from Lijiang, there are differences from place to place in the pronunciation of the vowels, consonants, and tones; there are also some differences in the lexicon and in the grammar. The point of view adopted in Chinese scholarship consists of using the phrase 'Naxi dialect' for all the language varieties closely related to Naxi—although quite a few of these language varieties are not called Naxi by the speakers themselves and are actually so distant from it that they are not intelligible to Naxi speakers from Lijiang. Chinese linguists distinguish two dialect areas: Western and Eastern.<sup>5</sup> The Western area is relatively homogeneous linguistically; throughout this area, the name of the language (autonym) is 'Naxi' (the exact transcription is /nɔ̌hi/). (In this article, the phrases 'Naxi language' and 'Naxi dialects' will be restricted to this area, following the practice of the speakers themselves.) This area largely corresponds with the territory controlled by the feudal lords of Lijiang: the plain of Lijiang had semi-independent rulers as early as the tenth century and until the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The relative homogeneity of Naxi dialects is due to historical causes. The centralization of power in Lijiang created a degree of linguistic convergence, and the enforcement of conscription presumably played a role in leveling dialect differences: it is generally observed that nonstandard dialects tend to be stigmatized or derided—typically, the dialect of a major city is more prestigious than that of smaller cities and villages—and that conscripts are under strong social pressure to adopt the most prestigious dialect. As for the languages referred to in Chinese scholarship as 'Eastern Naxi,' they are so diverse that it appears more adequate to refer to them as distinct languages, rather than as dialects of a single language—keeping in mind that there is no clear boundary between a language and a dialect. These languages, referred to in Chinese scholarship as 'Naxi dialects,' will be referred to here as 'Naish languages.'<sup>7</sup>

It is of paramount importance to linguistic research to possess data on various Naish languages, not on one variety only. Minor differences in pronunciation within the Naxi area proper are best studied through comparison with other Naish languages. Suppose, for instance, that a to-mba priest from the village of Nda-le (to the south of Lijiang; see map, page 93) pronounces 'horn' as /kʰɑ̌/ whereas a priest from Old Town of Lijiang pronounces this word as /kʰǒ/, with a different vowel. This difference in pronunciation is not reflected in the writing; it is solely due to a difference in the Naxi dialects of the priests, who, when reciting rituals, pronounce such common words as they would in everyday conversation. It is tempting for researchers whose interest lies in the Naxi tradition to adopt a standard transcription, overlook dialect differences, and convert all the transcribed data into Standard Naxi. A standard transcription system was indeed developed in the 1950s, selecting the dialect of the city of Lijiang as the norm.<sup>8</sup> International Phonetic Alphabet symbols for the sounds of Naxi were selected, and a Romanized script was created. Although this transcription system is not actually used among the Naxi, it has served as a standard for researchers. One consequence is that a transcriber working with a priest whose pronunciation differed from the standard did not actually transcribe that dialect on its own terms: instead, the transcriber converted the sounds into the standard transcription. This choice was made for the sake of convenience: standardization allows the relatively rapid training of large teams of transcribers. Requiring each transcriber to work out the entire phonetic system of the dialect of each speaker would have been unrealistic since this requires solid training in linguistics and a painstaking analysis of the language variety under study.

For linguists, however, the fine details whereby dialects differ from one another are precious clues to the history of the Naxi language. When a dialectal difference is observed, all the words that belong in the same phonetic set are examined systematically. For example, the word 'horn' is presented in Table 1 as part of the entire phonetic set to which it belongs.

Table 1

Some correspondences between two Naxi dialects: Lijiang Old Town (defined as the standard variety of Naxi in China) and Nda-le (in the Lijiang plain).

Standard Naxi (Lijiang Old Town)	Nda-le Naxi	Meaning	Correspondence between vowels
k <sup>h</sup> oɿ	k <sup>h</sup> aɿ	'horn'	o:a
k <sup>h</sup> oɿ	k <sup>h</sup> oɿ	'to kill (animal)'	o:o
k <sup>h</sup> oɿ	k <sup>h</sup> aɿ	'noise'	o:a
k <sup>h</sup> oɿ	k <sup>h</sup> aɿ	'hole'	o:a
laɿjɿk <sup>h</sup> oɿ	laɿjɿk <sup>h</sup> aɿ	'sleeve'	o:a
oɿ	aɿ	'turquoise'	o:a
oɿ	aɿ	'trunk (of tree)'	o:a
soɿloɿ	saɿlaɿ	'bone'	o:a
hoɿ	hoɿ	'rib'	o:o

The first two examples, 'horn' and 'to kill,' have the same vowel in Standard Naxi. However, the fact that they have different vowels in Nda-le Naxi shows that they have two distinct historical origins. It is a basic principle of historical linguistics that sounds are not expected to change at random: the presence of a vowel /a/ in the word for 'horn' in Nda-le Naxi is not due to chance. The presence of other examples exhibiting the same sound correspondences, such as 'noise' and 'hole,' puts to rest any suspicion that the vowel correspondence o:a for 'horn' is due to some unaccountable anomaly. 'Horn' and 'to kill' must therefore be assumed to have had different pronunciations at a time before Standard Naxi and Nda-le Naxi split apart (due to historical events such as migrations). If only one variety of Naxi were documented, these pieces of historical information would be irretrievably lost. As more dialects of Naxi are described, linguistic investigation can proceed further. In the case of the data in Table 1, crucial evidence comes from another Naish language: the language spoken in Yongning—referred to by different authors as Yongning Na, Mosuo, or Moso.<sup>9</sup> In Yongning Na, the words that have a vowel correspondence o:a between Standard Naxi and Nda-le Naxi all have an uvular initial consonant: an initial pronounced further back in the mouth than the velar /k/. It is plausible that these uvular consonants are of some antiquity in the Naish languages. The crucial evidence comes from a highly conservative language of the Sino-Tibetan family, which is distantly related to the Naish languages: the words that have an uvular consonant in Yongning Na also have an uvular initial in Rgyalrong, a language spoken in Sichuan, China.<sup>10</sup> The interpretation is that, in the course of the historical evolution which led to Standard Naxi, the uvular consonants merged with the velar consonants without leaving any traces; in Nda-le Naxi, they also merged with the velars, but before they disappeared, they influenced the pronunciation of the following vowel in such a way that the vowel \*a following uvulars and the vowel \*a following velars had different evolutions. (Note that the asterisk, \*, is used to indicate reconstructed forms, i.e. hypotheses about past forms, as opposed to forms found in the Naish languages as we observe them today.)



Therefore, dialectal differences are essential for research; in this respect, the official creation of a standard transcription for Naxi was a mixed blessing. It would be a valuable resource for linguists to have transcriptions of rituals as chanted by priests from the widest possible range of places within the Naxi area. Language documentation projects should ideally include the collection of the rituals that remain alive in Naxi language areas without a written tradition, in particular the counties of Muli (木里), Yanyuan (盐源), Yanbian (盐边) and Mianning (冕宁). If substantial numbers of transcriptions can be produced before these traditions fade from memory, this will yield precious historical insights about the evolution of the Naxi language. Conversely, linguistic research may provide useful insights into Naxi rituals.

## Evidence of the age of to-mba characters

How old are to-mba characters? This is not a simple question. Naxi scholars consider that major texts of the written Naxi tradition date from the Song dynasty, 960–1279; on the other hand, A. Jackson provocatively argues that Naxi texts really flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries only.<sup>11</sup> Some hints to the answer could in theory be gleaned from phonetic components within the characters. These phonetic components were developed to remedy the inherent limitations of pictographic writing systems: not many objects, persons, and actions can be represented in a simple pictograph. Pictographic systems therefore tend to be enriched through the combination of two or more basic pictographs, typically using one as a clue to meaning and one as a clue to pronunciation. This is especially well studied in the case of the Chinese writing system.<sup>12</sup> To take an example in the Naxi script, 'village' (pronounced /mbeɪ/) is represented by the character for 'house,' which is a highly stylized representation of a house (its roof and timber work and its two side walls), to which the symbol for 'snow' is added, drawn inside the 'house' character. The 'house' pictograph is used for its semantic value: 'house' and 'village' belong in the same semantic field. The symbol for 'snow' serves as a phonetic cue: 'snow' is pronounced /mbeɪ/ and is homophonous with 'village.' Also, a pictograph is sometimes used simply for its phonetic value, without any visual signal that it is being used for a pronunciation cue and not for its original meaning. For instance, the Naxi words for 'monkey' and 'life' are both pronounced /yɿ/; the pictograph for 'monkey' can be used to stand for 'life.'<sup>13</sup>

This is of special interest in assessing the age of to-mba characters. In the history of the Chinese writing system, simple characters were likewise used for their phonetic value; adding a semantic clue created a new character, and the resulting sets of characters are extremely useful to understand the history of the Chinese language.<sup>14</sup> Since the time when the characters were created, the Chinese language underwent considerable phonetic changes, but the characters remained basically unchanged. The phonetic components are therefore unreliable as a cue to the present-day pronunciation of the characters—hence the staggering complexity of Chinese characters for present-day Chinese language learners, who must learn characters whose initial phonetic motivations have long disappeared. For linguists, however, Chinese characters are of great interest because they provide evidence as to which words had similar pronunciations in ancient Chinese. Applying the same method to the Naxi pictographs, characters which share the same phonetic element call for a closer examination: they could potentially provide hints on sets of homophones or quasi-homophones from when the Naxi pictographs developed. Returning to the example above, does the use of the pictograph for 'monkey' to mean 'life' in some Naxi texts demonstrate that these words were already pronounced in the same way (or in a very similar way) centuries ago?

The answer to this question is somewhat disappointing: almost all the pictographs used for their phonetic value are transparent, that is, they are used for words that have the same consonants and vowels in the present state of the language (tone is simply overlooked).<sup>15</sup> This leads to the hypothesis that the Naxi writing system underwent a continuous historical evolution: unlike the Chinese writing system, which remained largely unchanged since its official codification, Naxi pictographs were not standardized, and priests modified them where they found it necessary. When a priest copied a character in which the phonetic element did not coincide neatly with the actual pronunciation of the intended word in his own speech, practical considerations would encourage him to substitute another, more adequate phonetic element. These decisions were not affected by the forces of tradition since the script was not standardized.

This leads to a question for future research: how did the Naxi script evolve from the earliest Naxi manuscripts? The study of the evolution of the characters could reveal changes in the system of Naxi sounds and could provide insights into the Naxi language spoken several centuries ago. An ideal basis for addressing this question would consist in studying a large sample of manuscripts, from the oldest (perhaps from the Ming period, 1368–1644) to twentieth-century manuscripts. Using manuscripts of the same rituals would facilitate this type of philological research.

## The origin of ‘strange’ words and turns of phrase in to-mba rituals

Art Publishers Some words are specific to Naxi rituals: they do not exist in colloquial Naxi and are unintelligible to people who have not been trained in the practice of rituals. Table 2 provides some examples.

Table 2

Some words that differ between ritual language and colloquial Naxi.

Meaning	Naxi (colloquial)	Learned reading of to-mba character	Page number in Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu 1995	Page number in Rock 1963–1972
moon	heɬmeɬ	leɬ	91	223
sun	ŋɬmiɬ	biɬ	91	22
forest	çiɬ	biɬ	144	22
child	zyɬlyɬ	byɬ	–	26
chicken	æɬ	hɣɬ	167	191

Linguistic tools can be extremely useful to interpret these words. For example, the word /leɬ/ for ‘moon’ has equivalents (cognates) in two other Naish languages: Yongning Na, spoken in Yongning, which is located in the upper northeast corner of Lijiang Municipality,

5.1  
Fieldwork in the village of  
A-Sher, 2004. The author is  
transcribing a narrative told  
by Mr. He Xixian (和希贤).  
Photo by Song Jian (宋坚)



© Arnoldsche

and Laze, spoken in the county of Muli, which is northeast of Yongning (see map on page 93).<sup>16</sup> In Yongning Na, 'moon' is pronounced /tɿlmiɿ/; in Laze, it is pronounced /tɿelmieɿ/. The second syllable in these words can be analyzed as a suffix, like the /miɿ/ in the colloquial Naxi words for 'sun' and 'moon.' Leaving aside this suffix, and only considering the consonants and vowels of the main syllable, the correspondence between the language of Naxi ritual, Na, and Laze is /le:tɿ:tɿe/. The vowel correspondence /e:i:ie/ between Naxi, Na, and Laze is very common, as is the consonant correspondence /l:t:t/. The word /leɿ/ in ritual Naxi cannot be a recent borrowing from Yongning Na or Laze, or the vowel in Naxi would be the same as in the donor language. The presence of the vowel /e/ reveals that this is an archaic word.<sup>17</sup>

The conclusion to be drawn from this comparison is that the word for 'moon' used in Naxi rituals, /leɿ/, is a word of some antiquity, which has been replaced in colloquial Naxi by the term /heɿmeɿ/. The word /leɿ/ has disappeared from colloquial Naxi whereas it has been preserved in the language of rituals. At the time when the word /heɿmeɿ/ was coined, it was probably perceived as more familiar or vulgar than the older word, and the priests therefore continued to use /leɿ/, even after this word vanished from colloquial Naxi.

As for the word 'chicken,' /hɿɿɿ/, it has long been analyzed as a Tibetan borrowing,<sup>18</sup> though the exact conditions of borrowing need to be worked out (the classical Tibetan word for 'chicken' is bya; it was brought into Naxi via a Tibetan dialect which remains unidentified). Quite a few notions of the to-mba religion are borrowed from Tibetan religions along with numerous proper names. It is somewhat surprising that Tibetan borrowings are mostly restricted to proper names and religious notions given the influence of

Tibetan culture in this area, which borders on Tibet. This may be partly accounted for by the limitations of Naxi priests' command of Tibetan; however, another factor may be the way in which Tibetan influence was looked upon by the rulers of the Naxi area and by the Naxi priests. Language is very important in religion, as abundantly documented in the history of Christianity and the use of Latin. It is clear that Buddhist monks trained in Tibetan rituals actively resisted the local language and local cultural practices, which were perceived as threats to orthodoxy. A monk in the village of La-bai (拉伯) who translated Tibetan rituals into the vernacular—using the Tibetan alphabet to transcribe his native language (a Naish language close to Yongning Na)—was persecuted by the monastery authorities with such violence that he was driven to madness.<sup>19</sup> While the pressure of orthodoxy was probably less intense within the to-mba religion, concerns of political orthodoxy no doubt played a role in the evolution of to-mba rituals. The to-mba religion has sometimes been considered an emanation of folklore and indigenous culture—an age-old primitive religion directly addressing the forces of nature, which survived into the twentieth century as part of popular culture.<sup>20</sup> This is only part of the story: anthropological and historical research into the Naxi religion reveals the ties between the to-mba rituals and the political projects of the Naxi state of Lijiang from the late fourteenth to the mid-eighteenth century. The to-mba religion appears to have been used as part of a strategy of territorial expansion, playing, in effect, the role of an official cult.<sup>21</sup> Time and again in the history of the Naxi, the influence of Tibet was a sensitive issue. The creation of family names based on Chinese characters (such as Mu [木] for the ruling clan and He [和] for commoners) is one significant episode in the sinicization of Naxi culture.<sup>22</sup> The pressure to adopt Chinese family names makes itself felt to this day in areas where names of Tibetan origins are still used, for example in Yongning, where political tensions lead some local people to insist (in the face of linguistic evidence to the contrary) that their names are purely local and to deny their Tibetan origin. The observation by linguists that the proportion of Tibetan words in Naxi rituals is relatively low may be interpreted as evidence of resilience to Tibetan influence, which is worth investigating further from a historical-anthropological point of view.

In addition to individual words (typically nouns) in the rituals that differ from the everyday language, there also exist special turns of phrase (morphosyntax). Here is an example from the ritual /toŋkʰwɿ/:

kyɿpʰə̃ɿ	kyɿhə̃ɿ	kyɿnəɿ	kyɿʂwɿ	kyɿhyɿ	wəɿsyɿ	tʰyɿ
white egg	green egg	black egg	yellow egg	red egg	five kinds	appear
kyɿ	byɿ	hiɿ	mɿɿ	gyɿ (...) <sup>23</sup>		
egg	hatch	nominalizer	negation	existential verb		

A literal translation could be: “A white egg, a green egg, a black egg, a yellow egg, a red egg: there appeared five kinds (of eggs), but there was no hatcher (to hatch them).” The word /hiɿ/ means ‘person’ or ‘human being’ in colloquial Naxi; in this passage, it has a grammatical function, referring to the agent hatching the eggs. It means “that which hatches eggs” rather than “a person who hatches eggs.” This point is made clear by the Chinese translation, 没有什么东西来孵化它, which means “there was no thing to come and hatch them” and not “there was no one to come and hatch them.”

In present-day Naxi, this construction does not make sense: one would need to use the possessive /gxɿ/ to convey this meaning. However, looking at languages closely related to Naxi, this strange construction becomes clear. The nominalizer is actually pronounced in the same way as the word for ‘man’ in the two Naish languages mentioned earlier, Yongning Na and Laze. These two languages do not appear to have been in contact with



each other in the past few centuries; the presence of the same nominalizer in both languages is therefore probably due to a retention from Proto-Naish, the reconstructed common ancestor of Naxi, Na, and Laze, and not to a borrowing from one language into another. In this light, Naxi can be hypothesized to have had the same type of grammatical construction and to have lost it in the course of history; its survival in some to-mba rituals can safely be interpreted as an archaic feature. Thus, linguistic evidence leads to an unambiguous conclusion about the origin of this peculiar linguistic trait: it is not borrowed from another language, and it is archaic. Such analyses open new perspectives for research into the historical depth of Naxi rituals by providing tools for establishing their relative chronology.

## Concluding perspectives

Studying the Naxi books and the Naxi rituals with increasing philological precision is a formidable challenge; at stake are the interpretation of Naxi culture and the deconstruction of widespread clichés. The Naxi pictographic texts are commonly considered in present China as a homogeneous, self-contained body of traditional lore. This point of view is reflected in the phrase ‘Dongba culture’ (东巴文化),<sup>24</sup> which identifies the pictographic writing system as the defining characteristic of ‘traditional Naxi culture.’<sup>25</sup> This presents the culture of the Naxi as an idealized heritage from the distant past that has somehow survived into the present age. This is in keeping with the expectation that ethnic minorities should be steeped in tradition, preserving qualities of authenticity and peculiarity.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to this conception of ‘Dongba culture’ as fixed and timeless, philology and linguistics approach texts from quite the opposite perspective. There are numerous parallels between the philological-linguistic approach and the ethnohistorical approach. To the ethnohistorian, there is not one fixed Naxi identity but an ever-continuing process of construction and reinterpretation of identities in response to changing historical circumstances and opportunities.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, to the linguist, there is not one Naxi language but a complex landscape of interacting languages and dialects—each dialect lending itself, in turn, to an analysis of a variety of speaking styles (idiolects). Philology and linguistics can therefore be strong allies of history in its arduous task of analysis and reconstruction. Learning the origins of new characters and determining the approximate time frame of these innovations requires painstaking investigations. However, this area of research eventually yields evidence that can be used by historians for understanding the patterns observed in the rituals and for unraveling their complex history.

- 1 He Zhiwu, "The Specificities of the Naxi Pictographic Script, and the Difference Between Primitive Pictographs, Pictographic Writing and Ideographic Writing," *Yunnan Shehui Kexue* 3 (1981): 147.
- 2 Li Lincan, Chang K'un, and Ho Ts'ai, *A Dictionary of Mosuo Pictographs* (Hong Kong: Shuowenshe, 1953).
- 3 Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1995); Joseph Rock, *A Na-khi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1962, 1972).
- 4 Fu Maoji, *A Study of a Naxi Pictographic Manuscript, "White Bat's Search for Sacred Books," Computational Analyses of Asian and African Languages Monograph Series 6* (Tokyo: CAAAL, 1981–84); Editorial team, *An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1999–2000).
- 5 He Jiren and Jiang Zhuyi, *A Presentation of the Naxi Language* (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 1985), 107.
- 6 Guo Dalie and He Zhiwu, *A History of the Naxi People*, 2nd ed. (Chongqing: Sichuan Minzu Chubanshe, 1999), 135–38.
- 7 The term "Naish" was built by adding the suffix "-ish" used for lower-level language groupings to the name "Na," meaning "black," which is the autonym shared by speakers of these languages. The usefulness of a higher-level grouping that includes populations closely related to the Naxi is also recognized by anthropologists: for instance, Yang Fuquan advocates the use of the term "Na" studies instead of "Naxi" studies and points out the importance of taking into account the Na groups outside Lijiang (in particular those located in Sichuan) in historical and anthropological research (see Yang Fuquan, "Introduction," in *Collected Papers about Mosuo Society and Culture, 1960–2005*, ed. Latami Dashi, 4–8 [Kunming: Yunnan University Press, 2006]). A side advantage is that unlike the term "Naxi," which has a strict administrative definition as one of the fifty-six officially recognized ethnic groups of the People's Republic of China, "Na" can be defined as an ethnological concept independent of the officially defined boundaries between ethnic minorities. About the Na groups of Sichuan, see also: Yang Shangkong and Bai Lang, *Studies on Na(xi) Culture in Sichuan* (Beijing: Wenlian Chubanshe, 2006).
- 8 See: He Jiren and Jiang Zhuyi, *A Presentation of the Naxi Language* (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 1985), 130.
- 9 See, in particular: Liberty Lidz, *"A Descriptive Grammar of Yongning Na (Mosuo)"* (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2010).
- 10 See: Guillaume Jacques and Alexis Michaud, "Approaching the Historical Phonology of Three Highly Eroded Sino-Tibetan Languages: Naxi, Na and Laze," *Diachronica* 28, no. 4 (2011).
- 11 Guo and He, *A History of the Naxi People*, 159; Anthony Jackson, *Na-khi religion* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979).
- 12 See, in particular: Redouane Djamouri, "The Development of the Writing System in Early China: Between Phonographic Necessity and Semiographic Efficiency" in *Ecriture chinoise: Données, usages et représentations*, ed. F. Bottéro and R. Djamouri, 1–34 (Paris: Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Centre de recherches linguistiques sur l'Asie orientale, 2006); and references therein.
- 13 These and other examples are reported by Fang and He, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters*, 67–70.
- 14 See, for example: Laurent Sagart, "L'emploi des phonétiques dans l'écriture chinoise" in *Ecriture chinoise: Données, usages et représentations*, ed. F. Bottéro and R. Djamouri, 35–53 (Paris: Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Centre de recherches linguistiques sur l'Asie orientale, 2006).
- 15 There are nonetheless a few exceptions, which are worth investigating: for instance, the character for 'door' (present realization: /k'uɿ/) is used to transcribe 'to wish,' pronounced /hoɿ/ (see Fang and He, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters*, 70). At present, I have no explanation for this.
- 16 Data on these languages were collected firsthand in the course of four field trips from 2006 to 2009. About Laze, see: Huang Bufan, "A Survey of Muli Shuitian," *Journal of Sino-Tibetan Linguistics*, no. 3 (2009): 30–35; and Alexis Michaud, "The Prosodic System of Muli Shuitian (Laze)," *Minority Languages of China*, no. 6 (2009): 28–33. About Yongning Na, see: Alexis Michaud, "Phonemic and Tonal Analysis of Yongning Na," *Cahiers de linguistique—Asie Orientale* 37, no. 2 (2008): 159–96; and Lidz, "A Descriptive Grammar of Yongning Na (Mosuo)."
- 17 For a detailed discussion of the phonetic correspondences between Na, Laze, and Naxi and of the method used for linguistic comparison and reconstruction, the reader is referred to specialized work on this topic: see Jacques and Michaud, "Approaching the Historical Phonology." In a nutshell, long-distance comparison between Naxi, Na, and Laze, on the one hand, and conservative languages of the Sino-Tibetan family, on the other, shows that words which have the vowel correspondence /i:ie:/ between Na, Laze, and Naxi had the vowel \*a at earlier times in their history, a stage referred to as 'proto-Naish.'
- 18 See: Fang and He, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters*, 167; Rock, *A Na-khi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 191.
- 19 Lamu Gatusa, personal communication with author.
- 20 See, for example, Guo and He, *A History of the Naxi People*, 222.
- 21 See: Christine Mathieu's essay in this volume; Christine Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study of the Ancient Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland: Naxi and Mosuo* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003). The use of Naxi rituals as political instruments is also mentioned by: Guo and He, *A History of the Naxi People*, 159. For analyses of the relationship of the religion of the Pumi or Prinmi (one of the most important neighbors of the Naxi) to other religions present in the same area, see: Koen Wellens, "Consecrating the Premi House: Ritual, Community and the State in the Borderlands of East Tibet" (working paper 288, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, 2006).
- 22 Examples of the alteration of cultural traits to comply with Chinese models abound in contemporary writings about the Naxi tradition. For instance, He Limin's textbook (*Popular Dongba Script* [Guangdong: Guangdong Keji Chubanshe, 2007]), which was intended to give the younger Naxi generation a sense of "to-mba culture," consists of lessons in which each syllable is represented by one to-mba character. This is very unlike the Naxi traditional texts, where character groups of varying length served as mnemonic cues to a portion of a ritual. One-to-one correspondences between characters and syllables effectively sinicizes the Naxi script, using it in a way that complies with Chinese habits. In this instance, sinicization is implicitly justified by a need for simplicity and clarity, with a view to making the Naxi script popular with a present-day audience.
- 23 He Kaixiang and others, *An Annotated Translation of Naxi Dongba Classical Texts* (Kunming: Yunnan Minzu Chubanshe, 1989), 3:4. The notation is slightly adapted, in keeping with the phonemic analysis set out in: Boyd Michailovsky and Alexis Michaud, "Syllabic Inventory of a Western Naxi Dialect, and Correspondence with Joseph F. Rock's Transcriptions," *Cahiers de linguistique—Asie Orientale* 35, no. 1 (2006): 3–21; and Alexis Michaud, "Three Extreme Cases of Neutralisation: Nasality, Retroflexion and Lip-rounding in Naxi," *Cahiers de linguistique—Asie Orientale* 35, no. 1 (2006): 23–55.
- 24 Used, for example, by: Guo Dalie and Yang Shiguang, eds., *Collected Papers About Dongba Culture* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1985).
- 25 See: Emily Chao, "Hegemony, Agency, and Representing the Past: the Invention of Dongba Culture Among the Naxi Minority of Southwest China" in *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan*, ed. M. Brown, 208–39 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
- 26 See, in particular: Stéphane Gros, "Le lieu du pouvoir. Mémoire et enjeu de l'histoire chez les Drung du Yunnan (Chine)" in *Les faiseurs d'histoires*, ed. G. Krauskopff, 189–95 (Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie, 2009).
- 27 See: Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*.

# Naxi Women and the Dongba Tradition

He Zhonghua (和钟华)

Translated by Christine Mathieu and Yao Jieqian

Naxi women are celebrated for their hard work and their independent spirit, but their position and status in society and the family has gone through many changes during the course of history. Today, the Naxi nationality is split between two territories, east and west of the Jinshajiang, as the Yangzi River is known in this part of China. The high mountainous terrain has influenced the development of these two groups, the Naxi and the Mosuo, and resulted in many socioeconomic and cultural differences between them. This article is concerned with the Western Naxi only—and specifically with the women of Lijiang and their place in the Dongba religion.

The Dongba religion has evolved over a long period of time and under the same social conditions that transformed Naxi society from matriarchy to patriarchy. In ancient times, Naxi society was gender egalitarian, and the manuscript tradition testifies to a pervasive egalitarian worldview. For example, the Naxi creation story tells that all the things in the universe were created by the union of masculine and feminine principles: hence, nine brothers opened the sky and seven sisters opened the earth. In the Dongba worldview, gods and ghosts are depicted as having husbands and wives, each with their own position and sphere of responsibilities. Within a couple, husbands and wives are interdependent and have equal status. Thus, Dongba ritual texts stress the equal importance of men and women as well as their indivisibility.

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## The feminine in Dongba mythology

The feminine principle played a crucial part in early Dongba culture. Many Dongba myths and elements of oral lore have female characters at the core of their narratives. In the Naxi ancestral story, Cobbertu, the sky goddess Coheibubami is the mother of the Naxi. With her superior intelligence, she saves the human hero Cosseilee'ee from her murderous father and marries him.<sup>1</sup> They have three sons, who become the fathers of the Tibetans, the Naxi, and the Bai.

The Dongba manuscript entitled Mu'eesiu tells the story of the heroine Oyidunumi and her eight brothers, who were eaten by the demon Mu'eesiu while herding their animals. To avenge her brothers, Oyidunumi enters Mu'eesiu's infernal cave to find what he fears most, and she kills him.

Another famous Dongba story tells about the war between the Ddu and Su clans, who fought over the sun and the moon. The Ddu clan represents brightness and the Su clan darkness. The Su clan stole the sun and the moon from the Ddu clan, which started a war between the two tribes. In one version of this story, entitled Ddudeetutami, the daughter of the Ddu clan defeated the Su clan and remained with the Su clan. She then created the sun and the moon and brought brightness to the Su. In another version, called Ddu'ai Su'ai, the daughter of the Su clan, Gelaceemu, lured the son of the Ddu clan, Ddusso' Alu, with

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6.1  
Mrs. He Zhonghe, who worked as a butcher until she retired. She is wearing the seven stars that are part of the traditional costume of Naxi women.  
Photograph by Christine Mathieu

her beauty, and Alu was then murdered by her clan. The Ddu clan then went to war against the Su and defeated them.

In these stories, the key female characters have the power to shake heaven and earth: they kill demons, bring light to humanity, and they sacrifice themselves for love.

Another Dongba story, Biupaguasu, relates how the goddess Perzesoma first owned the books and methods of divination. When the ancestors of humanity, Cosseilee'ee and Coheibubami became sick, they sent the white bat to the earth to ask for the divination books. But on its way back to heaven, the white bat opened the box. All of the pages of the book blew away, and three hundred sixty pages were swallowed by the golden frog. Perzesoma sent her archer to kill the frog. She recovered her books and was able to cure the sick ancestor couple. Since then, all of the different tribes have had their own books of divination.

The tragic story of Kaimeijjeumiji, the first to commit love suicide, is told during the Heirleluke ceremony. The tale begins with a group of young men and women who are herding their animals in the mountains and decide to run away because they do not want to marry the people their parents have chosen for them. Kaimeijjeumiji, however, is separated





6.2  
Mrs. He Zhonghe with the  
traditional goat skin cape and  
seven stars.  
Photograph by Christine Mathieu

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from her lover, Zheeguyuleiper, when his parents call him home. Kaimeijjeumiji waits for her lover to return to her, day after day, but she receives nothing but his parents' curses. In her despair, she hears the call of the demons that cause lovers to commit suicide, and she hangs herself. When Zheeguyuleiper returns, he discovers his dead lover, and he too kills himself. The method of his death varies in different versions of the story. In one version, he immolates himself on Kaimeijjeumiji's funeral pyre; in another, he slits his own throat; in another, he is killed by Kaimeijjeumiji's ghost.

Thus, not all Dongba representations of feminine principles are positive. The story of Kaimeijjeumiji provides a mythical model of female loyalty to love. In the war between the Ddu and the Su clans, feminine beauty is a weapon of war. The Dongba manuscripts depict the feminine in positive and negative situations, and female protagonists may be beautiful and kind, but they may be ugly and evil. One example is the evil demon queen Semimassogusoma, the wife of Dongba Shilo, who carries nine copper pots, nine iron

sickles, and nine iron chains; she carries nine leather bags, and she commands three hundred sixty demon soldiers who ceaselessly harass and eat people.<sup>2</sup> According to the Dongba belief, Dongba Shilo comes to the earth to rescue the people from Semimassogusoma; he marries the demon queen and, after a series of events, he kills her and her demon soldiers.

## Female ritual specialists in the Dongba religion

The Dongba manuscripts relate that a goddess was the first to master the books of divination. The purpose of divination is to remove evil and pollution and to cure illnesses. In the manuscripts, the ritual diviner is called the Pa, who is always depicted as a woman. The Pa combined the knowledge of divination and the power of trance so that she could communicate directly with the gods and the ghosts. The Pa was the agent of the gods among the people and she commanded the highest respect in society. This specialist, however, is no longer found in contemporary Lijiang.

In Dongba mythology, the goddess Perzesoma is the ancestral deity of the Pa, and she lives in the eighteenth heaven, where she is surrounded by the three highest gods. Only her books can cure people, and the knowledge of divination is passed down from her to the Pa specialists. Perzesoma is among the highest and most revered deities.

As the Dongba religion evolved, it acquired another ecstatic performer called the Sani. The pictographs depict the Sani as a man or a woman, and the female Sani is depicted in a similar way to the Pa diviner. But the Sani has no books.

Another ritual specialist, the Bu, also aims to avert disaster, to worship the gods, and to exorcise the ghosts. The Bu is always a male. Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu describe him as the shaman of the Dongba religion, always depicted as a sitting male figure, he wears a crown and chants from the sacred manuscripts.<sup>3</sup> The Bu thus replaced the Sani; as the Sani came to specialize in divination only, their ritual and social status was eroded. Dongba rituals became increasingly concerned with the sacrifices to the gods, and eventually the ritual offices became the exclusive domain of men.

## The position of Naxi women from the early Qing dynasty to the Republican period (1912–1949)

Naxi society retained a culture of gender egalitarianism through much of its history. When Lijiang was integrated into the Qing administration in the reform of 1723, however, Confucianism and many ideas that depreciated women became increasingly influential. The resulting conflicts between Naxi culture and Han immigrant culture shaped a local cultural phenomenon.

The role of women in Naxi society became two-fold, and their status became ambiguous. On the one hand, they were constrained by Confucian notions of male superiority; on the other, they continued to enjoy a large degree of social equality, personal freedom, and personal influence.

In the religious sphere, women were now entirely excluded from Dongba activities, but Sani shamans—who were mostly women—still practiced among the Naxi. According to the scholars Yang Fuquan and Li Yin, most Sani specialists are women even today, and most of the clients of the Sani are also women.

Within the family, Naxi women continued to play a significant role, though it was now a secondary one. Although the male heads of households decided on major expenditures, women participated in decision processes and administered the day-to-day affairs of the home. Women were respected in their family and they were frequently praised by society.

Although Naxi women had no place in the ritual sphere or in public administration, they held a prominent place in the economy. Naxi women ran businesses and owned shops, and they sold their agricultural products on the market square. In fact, in the Lijiang market, almost all of the stall holders in the 1940s were women, so many that the street that leads to the market is called "Women's Street."

After the naturalization of Lijiang into the Chinese imperial system in 1723 (the reform known as *gaitu guiliu*), arranged marriages replaced the custom of free-choice marriage, young Naxi retained the freedom to dance and flirt before they married. Young men and women remained free to mingle and to sing and dance at the many festivals that took place during the year. For example, the festival of Saddo, the lantern festival (a Han celebration), the festival of the Dragon King, and temple fairs all created opportunities for young people to meet and have fun and fall in love. The tensions and contradictions between the expectations of arranged marriage and the freedom granted to young people sometimes led to marriage by capture and elopement, but too often it resulted in suicide.

Marriage by capture was the preferred form of marriage for families who could not afford the expense of a wedding feast. The parties on both sides would come to an agreement, and on a given day, the groom would elope with his bride. Sometimes, marriage by capture would also occur when the family suspected that the bride-to-be had a lover and that she was willing to commit suicide, in which case the groom's family would kidnap the girl and bring her to their home. Young lovers could sometimes escape previous marriage arrangements by eloping together and leaving their families. In some cases, if all parties were willing, a girl could run to her lover's house; after some time, the families would enter into the necessary negotiations and the lovers could be married.

Love suicide, however, became a widespread custom among the Western Naxi. There are many songs about love suicides among the Naxi, and there are many reports of love suicides between Naxi and immigrants who had settled in Lijiang. The responsibility of the Dongba priests in this tragic custom cannot be ignored, for they had a new and very important role. When lovers killed themselves, a priest was called to perform the Heirleluke ceremony to exorcise the lovers' ghosts and the suicide demons that ride on the wind. Even today, old Naxi men and women recall that whenever the Dongba priests were summoned to propitiate the wind demons, young people would rush to the unfortunate village to witness the rites. The Heirleluke held untold fascination for the young Naxi. The ceremony was always performed at night, and when they heard the priest chanting the story of Kaimeijjeumiji, the young people became immersed in the moving story of the first tragic lovers and dreamed of a lovers' paradise beyond ordinary mortal life. This made not only the Heirleluke irresistible but also suicide itself.

## Naxi women in contemporary Lijiang

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, both Chinese and Naxi societies were radically altered. After the revolution, gender egalitarianism pervaded the nation, and Lijiang was no exception. Naxi women were quick to express their independent disposition. They enrolled in every type of school, joined the public administration, worked in commerce, factories, hospitals, and in the fields of science. Especially under Deng Xiao-

ping's open-door policy and the liberalization of the economy, Naxi women have become intellectuals, managers, and employers, and the influence of this new generation is felt within China and overseas. Naxi women from all walks of life now are free to take part in all aspects of family life and society: to engage in sports and recreation; to dance, sing, and join traditional music orchestras; to participate in religious and folkloric activities—and, not least, to attend the Dongba rituals from which they were once excluded.

#### NOTES

- 1 For a more complete account of the Naxi creation story, see Christine Mathieu's essay in this volume.
- 2 Semimassogusoma's instruments (pots, chains, and so forth) make her a frightening figure. The number 9 is also usually associated with the masculine realm as well as the domain of the mountain while 7 is a feminine number. Thus, Semimassogusoma carries nine pots because, although female, she is not an ordinary woman but a demoness.
- 3 Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1981), 350.

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# On the Mosuo Daba Religion

Lamu Gatusa (拉木嘎土萨)

Translated by Christine Mathieu and Yao Jieqian

Many scholars believe that the Daba religion is an earlier version of the Dongba religion. Daba is the ancient religion of the Mosuo people, who are also known as “Eastern Naxi.” The Daba religion is based on primitive nature worship or animism, and its corpus is passed down from teacher to disciple. Unlike the Dongba tradition, the Daba religion is entirely oral. The Daba priests have no books and must rely on their memory. The Daba tradition is a record of Mosuo economic life, ideas, morality, and attitudes toward nature—a window onto the worldview of ancient Mosuo society.

Certainly, Daba and Dongba traditions share a number of common features. Some are relatively superficial, like the dress and ceremonial styles of their priests, and others are more substantial, such as the names of the ancient specialists, Pu and Pa, which are also found in the Naxi Dongba religion. However, there are also some significant differences: the Daba priests do not have books and the founder of their religion is Mabuzzeru, not Dongba Shilo. The highest Daba god is Mulu Abaddu, the Great Heaven, not Soyiwade.

The Daba religion is an animistic tradition, with some shamanistic and some formal religious aspects. It is fair to say that it is in between shamanism and organized religion. Although the word daba sounds like dongba, it has no evident relationship to the Naxi word, which is derived from the Tibetan word for teacher (stonpa). The syllable “da” refers to the ritual cuts that the priests make on sticks, which help prompt their memory, not unlike the beads of a rosary. The priest chants one word at a time, one cut at a time, and he calls to heaven, to the earth, to the mountain peaks, to the river valleys, and to the ancestors who will watch over the ritual as evil ghosts are cut down and chased away, one word at a time. The priest invokes the protection of the gods, he uproots evil, and he exorcises the ghosts who interfere with the lives, the health, and the happiness of people.

## Daba ritual specialists

Daba priests, like Dongba priests, are part-time specialists. Daba priests cannot leave their agricultural work and, according to the rules of the tradition, they cannot ask for payment for their services. They cannot exploit the people they assist. They must show compassion, show consideration for the weak and the poor, and apply themselves to the study of the rules and rituals of their tradition. Daba priests also must observe personal discipline: they are not supposed to overindulge in wine drinking or sexual activities.

At a glance, the Daba priests resemble Naxi Dongba priests: they wear long robes and ceremonial crowns, and they also beat the large flat drums used by Gelugpa monks. Like the Dongba priests, the Daba priests have no temples or monasteries and they perform rituals outdoors or inside houses. Daba rituals and ceremonial spaces, however, are less elaborate than their Dongba counterparts. Daba priests also use flour effigies, ritual wooden slats (kobiu), and various sticks, but they do not decorate them. The Daba priest

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7.1  
Lake Lugu in Yongning, and in the distance, the mountain goddess Gamu, patron deity of the Mosuo people.  
All photographs in this chapter by Lamu Gatusa

may use a table as an altar or place the ceremonial objects, grain, and various food offerings on the ground.

Every Mosuo lineage segment, or *seze*, traditionally had at least one Daba specialist but often more, depending on the size of the group. Kinship plays a crucial part in Daba ritual boundaries. Priests may train their own sons or nephews or any other relative who is intelligent enough to memorize the hundreds of chanted hours that make up the ritual texts. If a priest is sick or absent, a priest from another lineage segment can be sent for, but the substitute priest will need to be provided with the genealogy of the *seze* before he will be able to conduct the ritual. Aside from this list, the ritual content of the ceremony will be the same, unless the substitute priest has forgotten parts of his text. In order to fulfill the needs of their communities, priests often memorize several genealogies in addition to learning their rituals. Unlike Buddhist monks, Daba priests cannot leave their work to learn their rituals; they must study in the evening and in the early morning.

7.2  
A Daba priest chants during a  
ritual performance.



A priest, however, can train three to five disciples. Once disciples have completed their learning, they must pass a test and conduct a special ceremony attended by famous high priests, known as Great Dabas, and senior graduates. If the graduating disciple conducts the ceremony to satisfaction, one of the Great Dabas then performs another ritual, the shanayinake, in which a black bull is slaughtered. This signals that the graduate has now become an initiated priest. At a later stage, the teacher and student will walk together to a snowy place high up in the mountains, where the teacher will perform zhanzhan, a ritual in which the power of the master is transferred to the former student.

## Former ritual specialists

In earlier times, the Daba tradition had three ritual specialists: the Ha Daba, the Pu Daba, and the Pa Daba.

The Ha Daba practiced scapulimancy, or bone divination from animal shoulder blades. The Ha Daba decided when to perform rituals: to propitiate heaven, earth, and the moun-



tain gods; to celebrate the yearly rituals; to worship the ancestor spirits; and to guide the souls of the departed on the road of the dead. The word ha means “to pray, to worship.”

The Pu Daba propitiated the gods, but his main function was very much like that of the Dongba priest and of the old Bubbu specialists depicted in the Dongba manuscripts:<sup>1</sup> the Pu Daba suppressed and exorcised evil ghosts and demons. The word pu means “to chant” and “to remove or separate.”

The Pa Daba was the diviner, like the Pa in the Naxi manuscripts.<sup>2</sup>

These three Daba ritual specialists were integrated into the current Daba specialist at some stage, under circumstances that were not recorded and have passed out of collective memory. The transformation of the ritual sphere, however, brought the standardization of Daba practice and content, which is the same throughout the Mosuo territory.

A fundamental rule of the Daba religion is that it must be concerned with the things of “this world” only. The Daba belief has no metaphysical dimension. According to the tradition, this rule was established long ago, when the mother of the chief Nabuka fell ill with a terrible sore throat and a fever. Her relatives called upon a Gelugpa Buddhist monk and a Daba priest to come to her bedside and heal her. At first, the monk and the priest chanted their own prayers from their own books, but this was unsuccessful. The priest then decided to perform another ritual. He placed a gourd in front of the patient, lit some juniper branches, and began to chant. While in the middle of his chanting, he suddenly broke the gourd, Nabuka’s mother felt a shock, and the pustules in her throat burst open. Her illness was cured. The chief recognized the worth of the Daba priest and despised the Buddhist monk. Nabuka then made a rule that the priest’s work should concentrate on the living in this life, on healing the sick and exorcizing the ghosts. Nabuka declared that the Gelugpa monk would focus on the afterlife, on personal salvation and the cycles of reincarnation, and conduct the funeral rites.

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## Ancestors, ghosts, and illness

Many people in the world worship their ancestors, but most worship male ancestral lines. The Mosuo worship mostly female ancestors and to a lesser extent male and female pairs who have equal status. When a relative dies, her or his soul is called yu. The yu are sent



7.3  
A Daba ritual performance.  
Note the unpainted wooden  
slats (kobiu) and the flat bell,  
which is like the Dongba zara,  
a bell typical of Bon rituals.



along the ancestral road to a place in the northeast called Seba'anawa. The Daba pantheon hosts all kinds of deities but, unlike the Chinese or Tibetan traditions, the Daba religion does not deify individuals, either as departed souls or as living gods. The Mosuo believe that everyone has two souls: the ancestral soul, which is the yu, and another dangerous and negative soul called ce. Ce ghosts are organized in clans and also divided according to insider and outsider categories. Insider ce are called kuchu and belong to relatives. Outsider ce are called bichu and are the very dangerous souls of people who are not related to the family and who are not related to the Mosuo. As a rule, the greater the kinship distance between the living and the departed, the more dangerous the ghost. The Mosuo believe that the most evil of all ghosts belong to the Daji clan.

In the Daba worldview, when relatives die, their souls live on. They dwell in Seba'anawa, from where they can see and protect their descendants. Their descendants cannot see them but they must nevertheless take care of them by making daily offerings of food and wine before serving themselves at a meal and by offering daily thoughts and short prayers. Every year, Mosuo families invite their ancestors to take part in a great feast served in the courtyards of their houses, with all living relatives present and which is presided by a priest.

When the ancestors feel neglected, or if they are hungry, they come back to the world of the living and cause minor illnesses to their family members, which shows that they are missing their living relatives. If the family conducts a ritual to feed and appease the discontented yu, the sick person will immediately recover. By contrast, a serious illness is always caused by the ghosts of outsiders and requires the services of the priest.

Every Daba ritual begins with the offering of food and wine, and the Daba priest, unlike the Dongba priest, chants in a soft and kind voice to induce the ghosts to leave. It is only when the ghosts do not leave (that is, if the sick person does not recover) that the priest will bring out his weapons and his sword to drive the ghosts away. It is possible that the softer approach reflects the matrilineal ethos of Mosuo society.

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## All things in the universe have a soul

The Mosuo word for "deity" is gala. There are Mugala (deities of the sky), Digala (deities of the earth), Hagala (of the wind), Rizigala (of the mountain), Zhigala (of the water), and so forth. The most significant Daba belief is that everything in the universe has a soul. Premodern people do not understand birth, death, and sickness; they are confronted daily by the forces of nature, the infinite blue sky, the stars, the sun, the mysterious unpredictability of the wind, snow, rain, hail, and thunder; they revere and fear the tall mountains that surround them; they feel hungry and feel full. To explain the mysteries of their condition, they develop notions of spirits.

The Daba tradition's take on the natural world is significantly different from that of the Dongba, in particular regarding the mountain gods. The Dongba approach to the mountain gods is ambivalent: on the one hand, the mountain spirits are said to have the same father but not the same mother as all of humanity, and as such they are a kind of relative; on the other hand, the Dongba priest must exorcize the serpent spirits as though they were the ghosts of outsiders. By contrast, the Daba religion regards the mountain gods entirely as the Mosuo's relatives. Foremost among Mosuo mountain deities is the goddess Gamu. Unlike the patron mountain warrior god Saddo of the Naxi, who is associated with the dangerous spirits of the wilderness, Gamu reflects the matrilineal ethos of Mosuo society. She is a Great Mother, a fertility goddess; she is beautiful, intelligent, kind, and seductive, and the surrounding mountain gods are her lovers. The Mosuo believe that every year,

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7.4  
The burning branches of scented wood provide incense for the ritual performance.

Gamu gambles with the gods of Tibet. If she loses, she will be angry and there will be bad weather and other misfortunes.

Premodern people, who do not have the cultural means for sophisticated abstract thought, are constantly reminded of their smallness and helplessness (especially next to the immensity of the surrounding mountains), and they turn to worshipping nature as a form of respectful negotiation. They socialize and anthropomorphize nature, and they personify natural phenomena. Rituals to propitiate the natural world are especially numerous in the Daba tradition. As people seek protection from the randomness of the world around them—earthquakes, floods, droughts, hail, and dangerous animals, as well as grief and other misfortunes—they use prayers or curses to restore happiness, balance, and harmony. Thus, nature worship and ancestor worship express and determine the core interests of the Mosuo religion.

## NOTES

- 1 See Christine Mathieu's and He Zhonghua's essays in this volume.
- 2 See He Zhonghua's essay in this volume.

# Interview with Professor Yang Fuquan

Yang Fuquan is Vice-President of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences and the Vice-Chairman of the International Society of Naxi Studies. In addition to his numerous publications on Naxi culture, Yang Fuquan has contributed to many international projects concerned with Naxi cultural and environmental preservation.

Christine Mathieu: After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, in 1949, all Dongba activities were stopped. Yet, scholars began recording and translating Dongba manuscripts for posterity. Could you give a short description of the work done at the Dongba Research Institute?

Yang Fuquan: The work of recording was initiated by Xu Zhenkang, a member of the Han nationality and a graduate from the Department of Foreign Languages at Yunnan University. Xu Zhenkang became party-secretary of Lijiang in 1959, and in 1962 he organized the recording and the translation of Dongba religious manuscripts. Although the Dongba tradition had been proscribed, there was a general awareness that it represented something of unique value to Naxi heritage. More than 5,000 manuscripts were collected with the support of the Lijiang County government, and 140 manuscripts were transcribed into Naxi using the International Phonetic Alphabet system (IPA) and translated into Chinese. Twenty-two of these translated works were actually published by a lithographic process. But with the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), all the work stopped. It was not until 1981 that the linguists and scholars could return to this immense project. And this time, there was a real sense of urgency. The Dongba priests never write down ritual texts in their entirety but write only a certain number of pictographs as mnemonics. This means that it is impossible to know the content of a manuscript without the help of a Dongba priest. In 1981, however, most priests were very old and their knowledge would pass with them.

CM: What happened next?

YF: In March 1983, the Lijiang prefectural government organized a symposium on Naxi Dongba and Na [Mosuo] Daba religions. Altogether sixty-one Dongba and Daba priests attended the meeting. They came from Lijiang, Zhongdian, Yongsheng, and Ninglang counties. The symposium also brought together thirty scholars from Beijing and Kunming, including such famous professors as Ren Jiyu and Dai Ailian. After these discussions, ten Dongba priests were invited to work with the Institute of Dongba Cultural Studies on the recording and translation work. Among them were the Dongba masters He Shicheng, He Kaixiang, and He Jigui. Some of the priests who participated in the symposium also began to perform Dongba rituals when they returned to their villages. They played an important role in the rehabilitation of Dongba activities in the 1990s, in the more remote parts of Lijiang.

CM: How many volumes have been translated from Naxi into Chinese?

YF: In over two decades, the scholars at the Institute transcribed and translated into Chinese almost one thousand ceremonial texts. These are contained in one hundred volumes



8.1  
He Jigui reads from a  
manuscript.  
Photograph by Cindy Ho

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entitled *An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts*.<sup>1</sup> There are also some translations with Naxi transcriptions by the Taiwanese scholar Li Lincan, who began to study Dongba manuscripts in the 1940s. And, of course, Joseph Rock translated some Dongba manuscripts into English. The celebrated Naxi scholar, He Zhiwu, published some translations of several Dongba manuscripts into Chinese, but his work did not include the original pictographic texts and phonetic transcriptions.

CM: He Zhiwu and Fang Guoyu occupy a very special place among the scholars of the Dongba religion. Can you explain why this is?

YF: Yes, their major joint work on Dongba studies is their Dongba pictographic dictionary, which was published in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Li Lincan also produced a dictionary of Naxi pictographs, and so did Joseph Rock. Fang and He, however, were Lijiang-born Naxi scholars. Fang Guoyu is regarded as a brilliant historian and a giant of Yunnanese scholarship. He Zhiwu was among the scholars who pioneered Dongba studies after the Communist revolution. He was interested in this work from 1949. He Zhiwu was the son of a Dongba family, and he had been a young priest himself. Later, he became a scholar.

CM: What is being done today to preserve the Dongba tradition?

YF: In several villages of Lijiang, some Dongba rituals are once again performed on a regular basis—in particular, the Sacrifice to Heaven and the propitiation of the *si* nature spirits. The Naxi scholar He Limin has established a Dongba training group in his village to pro-



mote Dongba rituals and other activities. And local government authorities have set up several workshops to teach basic Dongba knowledge in Lijiang. The Institute of Dongba Cultural Studies of Lijiang and the Dongba Cultural Museum of Lijiang also train young Dongba priests. Unfortunately, rapid social change and the impact of mainstream culture on the Naxi cannot be underestimated, and the preservation of Dongba culture is very problematic. There are very few truly knowledgeable Dongba masters, and they live mostly in the rural areas. In the township and the areas nearby, Dongba tradition continues to decline. Dongba rituals could be maintained if Naxi traditional folk festivals and customs could be preserved since most Dongba rituals are integrated with Naxi folk festivals and customs.

CM: Could you tell us about your own role in preserving Dongba heritage?

YF: In 1999, I initiated a project for training young Dongba priests according to traditional criteria. This project received the support of the Ford Foundation and The Nature Conservancy. The eight trainees were selected included three grandsons of the Dongba masters He Shicheng, He Kaixiang, and He Jigui. They lived with their Dongba teachers and studied daily. They were also asked to go back to their villages to perform Dongba rituals and to continue to learn traditional knowledge from other village elders. These trainees are now among the most knowledgeable of the new generation of Dongba priests.

CM: Is the tradition still passed from father to son?

YF: Yes, it is still possible for Dongba priests to train their sons, but today priests can also train any young men who are willing and capable. They do not have to be members of their family.

CM: How many young Dongba priests are there currently?

YF: There are about one hundred practitioners currently involved in Dongba cultural and tourist activities in Lijiang. But there are only forty actual priests who can conduct rituals and have received correct and systematic training from real Dongba teachers. There are very few great Dongba masters today.

CM: How old are the Dongba priests of the new generation?

YF: They are between twenty and forty-five years old.

CM: How long does it take to become a fully ordained priest?

YF: In order to become a knowledgeable Dongba priest—to be able to chant from many manuscripts and perform the major rituals and ceremonies—the training requires about ten years.

CM: Can women study to become Dongba priests?

YF: Traditionally, Naxi women could not become priests, and they still cannot today. However, there are women from Dongba families who are very knowledgeable about Dongba tradition because they have witnessed many rituals.

CM: Are there any Dongba rituals concerned with animal protection?

YF: Yes, especially the sigv ritual (worshiping the si spirits who are believed to control the spirits of nature: wildlife, forests, rivers, streams, and springs). The si spirits are believed to have the same father and different mothers as the Naxi people. According to customary law, it is forbidden to hunt wild animals at the beginning of summer because this is the time when the animals birth their young. These principles are closely related to Dongba mythology.



8.2  
Dancing: from left to right, He Zhiwu and He Limin with swords and flat bells. Behind them are three thangkas representing from left to right, the Naga deity Zonadochi, Dongba Shilo, and a black goat. The altar is an earth terrace, which is also used for the performance of the Sacrifice to Heaven. The Dongba wear the bbudde necklace, ka (crown), and long robes. These robes are in Han Chinese style. Such buttoned down robes were also worn by Dongba priests during the Republican period (1912–1949). They were probably adopted during the later part of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). In the pictographic manuscripts and in the paintings and funeral scrolls, the Dongbas wear robes that cross over the chest. Photograph by Cindy Ho

## Art Publishers

CM: What do you think of the way the Dongba heritage is promoted to tourists?

YF: The Dongba tradition is like Tibetan Buddhism: it is very appealing to tourists, and there is nothing anyone can do about this. There is no reason to deny tourists who are interested in the Dongba religion the possibility of learning about rituals, paintings, dancing, and so forth. I have no objection to promoting the Dongba culture to tourists. But I don't think the Dongba heritage should become a staged performance or a form of entertainment. We should try to show tourists the value and the spirit of the Dongba religion, especially the worship of nature and its importance to ecological conservation. We should also try to explain the traditional relationship between the Dongba religion and the Naxi people. And I wish there were more young Dongba priests with strong spiritual beliefs, who were committed to Dongba religious principles rather than to performing for tourists.

CM: How do you think the Naxi people feel about the influx of tourists?

YF: There are over 100,000 people in Lijiang City and the adjacent region. Most of them are Naxi who are benefiting from tourism. Even farmers benefit from it. We cannot deny the importance of tourism. It is one of the so-called pillar industries of the Naxi area of Lijiang. Tourism has also fostered a local awareness of the value of our many local traditions. But the impact of tourism on the daily life of the Naxi people can be overwhelming, and tourism also threatens the authenticity of Naxi cultural production, including the Dongba religion. Lijiang and the Naxi face the challenging task of preserving their cultural heritage in sustainable ways—to find ways to maintain their intangible (non-material) cultural heritage and to train folk cultural specialists to preserve the cultural heritage for future generations. I think it is important for us to promote other forms of tourism like eco-tourism and small-scale, community-based tourism rather than uncontrolled mass tourism.

CM: Do you think that the interest of the international community has affected the way the Naxi feel about their heritage?

YF: Yes, I do. And there have been positive developments. The Naxi are now very proud of their cultural heritage, especially since Lijiang has received what we call the "Three Fames" from UNESCO. The Old Town of Lijiang is listed on the World Cultural Heritage list, Laojunshan Mountain at the center of the San Jiang Bing Liu ("Three Rivers Flowing in Parallel") is listed on the World Nature Heritage list, and the Lijiang Dongba manuscripts have been included in the Memory of the World Register.

CM: Does increased awareness of the value of Naxi culture mean that more young men are becoming interested in training as Dongba priests?

YF: There are many young people today who would like to train in the Dongba religion, but since the ritual tradition has declined even in the rural areas, they may prefer to use their Dongba knowledge in the tourist market. I am willing to help young Naxi to learn and understand the Dongba religion, but I would like to see its spiritual value respected and upheld. The Dongba tradition could play a more important role in the conservation and protection of the environment and also in the psychological well-being of the Naxi people.

CM: How is the Dongba religion influencing contemporary Naxi culture?

YF: The Dongba influence on contemporary culture is mostly aesthetic. The greatest area of influence is in the arts, especially in the visual arts. Many young painters are incorporating Dongba art into their own works. But while these modern painters are creating new works inspired by Dongba culture, the Dongba priests themselves maintain their traditional way of painting. He Xiudong's paintings, for example, are still very traditional. I think it is very important that the artists who develop their paintings by using Dongba art should understand something about Dongba tradition.

CM: The pictographs are no longer used by Dongba priests exclusively. Who uses pictographs and how?

YF: Of course, the Dongba priests still use pictographs to write their manuscripts. But today the pictographs are used by many people: artists, calligraphers, teachers, and even business people who hope to benefit from the tourist trade.

CM: You mentioned that painters incorporate Dongba artistic motifs in their own work. Does the Dongba tradition influence other arts besides the visual arts?

YF: Some performing arts aimed at the tourist market make use of Dongba mythology and motifs. Zhang Yimou, one of China's most famous film directors, directed Impressions of Lijiang at the foot of Yulong Xue Shan (Jade Dragon Snow Mountain), staging five hundred people from many ethnic groups who performed folk songs and dances for tourists. Dongba mythology is also influencing new fiction by modern Naxi writers.

CM: What are your most pressing concerns for Naxi heritage?

YF: The most important value the Dongba heritage holds for the Naxi is spiritual: the concern for harmonious relations between nature and human beings. The Naxi once lived in wisdom and friendship with nature; we still see these values in the lives of rural people, in their daily rituals, and in the traditional festivals. Of course, the economic value of the Dongba religion should not be depreciated and neither should its influence on the fine arts, performing arts, design, decorative arts, and even on traditional medicine. But personally, I prefer the first value, the significance of the Dongba tradition for Naxi spiritual life.

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CM: What current developments and changes give you the most satisfaction?

YF: Thanks to their cultural heritage, the Naxi now have the benefits of world fame and recognition from the international community and UNESCO, and they also have the benefit of economic growth from tourism. I am glad to see how appreciative of their culture the Naxi people are today. As you may know, the cultures of indigenous people like the Naxi were belittled by imperial officials in pre-Republican China. The historical records make it plain that the Naxi religion and culture were considered barbaric. In the not-so-distant past, Confucianism brought gender discrimination to Lijiang. Also, Naxi women were barred from many cultural activities. This has changed. For example, today, women can join the Classical Naxi Music Orchestra, and they can play Taoist music.

Of course, I am also concerned about the loss of some aspects of Naxi tradition and the decline of the Dongba heritage, in particular the dwindling number of religious specialists. Globalization, industrialization, and the mainstreaming of cultures pose formidable challenges to the Naxi, as well as to other people in the world. Our quest is to find the means to integrate the benefits of modernization, development, and indigenous knowledge to ensure the future well-being of the Naxi people.

#### NOTES

1 Editorial team, *An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1999–2000).

2 Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1981).

# Art Publishers



# Joseph Rock: Restless Spirit<sup>1</sup>

Silvia B. Sutton

Joseph F. Rock (1884–1962) arrived in western China in 1922 and spent most of the next twenty-seven years of his life there. He collected plants, hunted birds, took photographs, and explored the mountainous regions for various prestigious American institutions including the Department of Agriculture, the National Geographic Society, and the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University. Though he persisted in describing himself as a botanist—or sometimes, more expansively, as an explorer-botanist—he never published a single paper devoted to Chinese flora. And as time went by, his botanical activities became the means of supporting his passionate study of the Naxi people, among whom he lived.

There was little in Rock's family background to suggest a life of adventure in China. He was born in Vienna, the son of a dour manservant who determined that the boy would become a priest. His mother died when he was six, and Joseph developed into an introverted adolescent given to fantasies and unexcused absences from the classroom. He decided that he would travel, and he prepared himself by studying exotic languages under his bed covers at night when he was supposed to be sleeping. As soon as he graduated from the gymnasium, he defied his father and escaped Vienna to roam around Europe, supporting himself with menial jobs. One day, with no apparent forethought, he signed on as a cabin steward aboard a passenger ship bound for New York. There he arrived in 1905. He disembarked wearing his uniform underneath his street clothes and headed for the nearest pawnshop where he received some change for the outfit. Working as a dishwasher, and suffering attacks of tuberculosis, he made his way haphazardly to Hawaii where he landed penniless in 1907, despite having been warned by a physician that the sea air would kill him.

Thus far in Rock's peripatetic life he had evidenced only one talent: a gift for languages, of which it is said he already knew nine or ten including Chinese and Arabic. Within a few weeks, however, he found a position teaching Latin and natural history in a secondary school in Honolulu. He had no university degree and, although his Latin was excellent, he had little experience and had demonstrated no special interest in natural history. Yet he appears to have never considered the possibility that he might not be capable of teaching the subject. He accepted the job confidently and performed well.

Rock's obligation to his natural history students forced him to investigate the flora and fauna of Hawaii. He was particularly drawn by the vegetation, and he discovered that he liked working alone outdoors more than listening to adolescents conjugate irregular verbs in the classroom. Furthermore, contrary to the doctor's gloomy prognosis, his health improved. So one day, according to legend (the story, though not documented, is consistent with Rock's character) he marched into the office of the Division of Forestry of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, informed the startled officer in charge that the Division needed an herbarium, claimed he was a botanist, and proposed himself as the man to do the job. Arrogance, charm, and the fact that no one checked his credentials carried the day for him. His proposal was accepted, though there was little money to spare and none at all budgeted for an herbarium.



# Art Publishers

Rock delivered much more than he had promised. In addition to gathering prodigious quantities of herbarium specimens, he gave botany his undivided attention for the next decade and became the unchallenged authority on the flora of the Hawaiian Islands. By 1911 he had joined the faculty of the College of Hawaii where he taught botany. He published five books and dozens of papers. At least two of his volumes are today considered classics of botanical literature.

Rock was still a wanderer. During the years he was based in Honolulu, he made several excursions to distant shores to study vegetation, collect plants, and indulge his curiosity about strange places and peoples. In 1920 he became dissatisfied with certain administrative decisions at the college and left the Hawaiian Islands in a huff. Looking for a position on the mainland, he applied to the Gray Herbarium at Harvard which turned him away because it could not afford additions to its staff. His search ended in Washington, D.C., where the Department of Agriculture fulfilled his childhood dream by hiring him as an agricultural explorer and dispatching him to the Far East. In 1922, he made his entrance into China.

Rock lived in wild and troubled provinces in a chaotic nation. He witnessed civil wars, provincial wars, tribal wars, a world war, and a national revolution, not to mention the random savagery of ubiquitous bandits who plundered the Chinese countryside. He became fond of saying that the only constant in China was disorder. The border provinces of Yun-

9.1  
Explorer-botanist Joseph Rock  
sitting in his room in Yuhu  
village.  
Dr. Joseph F. Rock/National  
Geographic Stock Image  
ID: 362472

nan, Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai where he traveled were little known in the Western world and even among Chinese intellectuals congregated in the eastern cities. During his most intense periods of exploration, between December 1924 and August 1929, Rock made three journeys to Choni, where he spent several months as a guest of the Prince (and posed in fur-hatted costume for a photograph that would become widely published): explored the Minshan range and Tebu valleys near the Amnye Machen range and ventured into the Kokonor region; visited the monasteries at Labrang and Ragya, and made three extended trips to Muli. The fruits of one single season's exploration, April to September 1928, serve as an example of Rock's accomplishments: during a journey from Lijiang through Yongning to Muli, into the Konkaling range, and back to Lijiang, he amassed several thousand plant specimens, over 700 bird skins, 243 color plates, and 503 black-and-white photographs.

Rock traveled with a permanent entourage of Naxi assistants whom he often supplemented with local bearers and, when events warranted, a military escort. Even so he placed himself in great danger, of both natural and human origin: the precipitous mountain trail, the freak spring blizzard, the disease-bearing tick or flea, the murderous bandit, the suspicious tribesman. Rock meticulously recorded his hardships, complaining bitterly in his journals. Nevertheless he pushed on, fascinated by the almost unlimited possibilities for study—a dangerous temptation to dangle before a man of undisciplined energy and curiosity.

Having advanced so far under his own power, Rock was not disposed to recognize his limitations. Much of the area he traversed had never been explored, and the maps he bought had unnerving blank spaces. So Rock drew his own maps. He took compass bearings, measured altitudes, and noted the names of villages and landmarks. He transferred his findings to paper and sent sketches back to the National Geographic Society where his work was recognized by professional cartographers for what it was: the flawed product of a skilled amateur. When the cartographers gently urged him to learn a few simple mapping techniques, Rock balked.

Such intellectual willfulness occasionally led him into sensational blunders. In 1929, still in the service of National Geographic, Rock made three journeys to Minya Konka, the highest mountain in China proper. Other travelers had seen the peak from afar but had never explored it. Rock made three tours around it at the base, using his imperfect methods of measurement. Then he cabled society headquarters: "MINYA KONKA HIGHEST PEAK ON GLOBE 30250 FEET ROCK." The society's experts in Washington sensibly refused to take Rock literally and published the mountain's altitude at 25,600 feet. Accurate readings by more scientific methods eventually reduced Minya Konka to 24,900 feet—more than a mile below Rock's original estimate. Thereafter, whenever Minya Konka slipped into a conversation, Rock would hastily change the subject.

It may seem odd that a stubborn, petulant man who ignored expert advice he should have accepted could also be capable of exacting scholarship. But Rock was a man of many contradictions. "Eccentric," a word often used to describe him, is inadequate. Some people thought him mad, and Rock himself worried about his sanity—rightly so, judging from some of his journal entries.<sup>2</sup> Those writings reveal wildly fluctuating moods and reason sometimes so impaired that it is a wonder he survived in China.

Yet he not only survived, he survived in style. Edgar Snow traveled from Yunnanfu to Dali with Rock in 1930. "During the march, his tribal retainers divided into a vanguard and a rear guard," records Snow. "The advance party, led by a cook, an assistant cook, and a butler would spot a sheltered place with a good view, unfold the table and chairs on a leopard skin rug, and lay out clean linen cloth, silver and napkins. By the time we arrived our meal would be almost ready. At night it was several courses ending with tea and liqueurs."<sup>3</sup> Rock taught his cooks to prepare proper Austrian dishes; he ate quite enough Chinese food

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when he was being entertained by provincial governors or mountain potentates. He had his servants carry him into strange towns in a sedan chair so as to impress the inhabitants with his importance. Many astonished peasants believed him to be a foreign prince.

A superb photographer who used the camera sensitively, Rock created work on glass plates and film that remains one of the best visual documents of prerevolutionary western China. And, for all his imperfect methods, he contributed substantially to the geographical knowledge of the regions he explored. On top of all this, he produced a huge body of scholarship with his studies of the Naxi tribe of Yunnan.

Rock was perpetually restless. He never married or involved himself in emotional attachments that might restrict his movements. Whether his wanderlust was the cause or the effect of his solitude is a question for psychologists. In either case, the result was the same: Rock was lonely, but he was free. His life acquired an unconscious rhythm. He could endure about two years of the Chinese wilderness at one stretch. Then he would develop some pretext—such as organizing an expedition, purchasing new equipment or consulting a volume in a Parisian library—for returning to the West. He would gorge himself on operas, fancy hotels, haute cuisine, and social gatherings at which he was usually the star attraction. Yet he never really felt comfortable or quite sure of himself where no one mistook him for a foreign prince. After a few months, he would begin to complain about the “excesses of civilization”<sup>4</sup> and hasten back to what he liked to call the simple life. In China he spent much of his time on exploratory and botanical expeditions in the mountains, sometimes living in a tent for months. If he had been asked where his home was, he would have replied that he had none.

But even Rock needed some fixed point, if nothing more than a mailing address and a place to stash his belongings. In 1922 he set up his headquarters near Lijiang in western Yunnan, in sight of the glittering Yulong Xueshan, the Jade Dragon Snow Range. A city of some fifty thousand, Lijiang was the commercial center of a fertile plain. Other botanical explorers before Rock had used it as a base location because of its convenient location at the junction of caravan routes leading to the northern mountains, Tibet, and Burma. The place did not impress Rock very much on first sight: “a conglomeration of mud huts and a marketplace,”<sup>5</sup> he noted glumly. Yet he kept returning to it until finally it was the only spot on the globe that could evoke in him a sentiment resembling homesickness.

The Lijiang plain was the home of the Naxi tribe, believed by some to have descended from the ancient Qiang tribe who once inhabited northeast Tibet. The Naxi had effectively ruled themselves under the reign of their own kings for sixteen centuries until 1723, when the Manchus, covetous of the fertile Lijiang plain, assumed political control. Naxi rulers were deposed, and Chinese officials were sent to Lijiang to administer the area on behalf of the emperor. The Chinese regarded the Naxi as “barbarians,” a term they applied at random to all non-Han races. They treated the Naxi accordingly, and two hundred years of Chinese domination changed the tribe. Nevertheless, though they were considerably Sinicized by the time Rock arrived in Lijiang, the Naxi still retained vestiges of a separate cultural identity including a curious religion that seemed to combine elements of tribal shamanism with Bon, the heterodox religion of Tibet which claims historical priority over Buddhism.

Initially Rock did not pay much attention to the Naxi. He hired half a dozen tribesmen to help with his expedition and began to train them. Then one day in 1923, attracted by peculiar noises issuing from a neighboring house, he walked over to investigate:

“There were three wizards in full religious dress; in the courtyard they had erected what I would call a garden, twigs of Abies [fir] and oak trees stuck in the ground surrounded by pine sticks dipped in yellow paint; on small, crude pine boards gods were painted, and they were stuck about near the Abies twigs. At the end of this square



garden was a table full of wheat seed, old eggs and dry peas, and all kinds of figures made of dough. Yellow, white and purple flags were stuck about with prayers written on them. They had a regular menagerie made of flour dough, snakes drinking out of cups, goats, sheep, etc. The priests then danced around this, one using brass cymbals, the other a gong which he struck with a long sword. One was beating a drum, and to all this humdrum foolishness the sick woman looked on.<sup>6</sup>

Characteristically, Rock could not remain a passive bystander. He felt the woman's pulse, pressed a dose of castor oil upon her, and pronounced her cured.

Humdrum foolishness perhaps, but Rock was intrigued. The "wizards," whom the Naxi called tombas, chanted from strange manuscripts that stirred Rock's curiosity. His servants informed him that only the tombas could read the writing and that one generation of priests passed the knowledge along to the next. Rock hired the tombas he had seen to repeat their performance for him, and to explain in detail the ritual as well as the symbols of the manuscripts.

Thus began Rock's study of the Naxi tribe. He started by producing clumsy articles for the National Geographic, which the editors in Washington translated from his tortured syntax into National-Geographic-ese, eliminating a good deal of the scholarly content in the process. Rock became progressively more captivated by his research, using the intervals between sponsored expeditions to dig deeper into Naxi culture and language. Unfortunately, whereas exploring paid handsomely, his obscure scholarship paid nothing, and he had to draw on the proceeds from the former to support the latter. As he grew older and less vigorous, there were fewer expeditions, so Rock lived off his savings and the sale of artifacts he had picked up during his travels.

By the mid-1930's Rock had graduated from popular articles for the National Geographic to proper academic dissertations. His work embraced the history of the Naxi tribe as well as the elucidation and translation of its religious ceremonies. Before the decade ended, he had completed his manuscript on Naxi history, published several studies of religious ceremonies, and was well into his magnum opus, a Naxi-English encyclopedic dictionary.

When the Japanese invaded China in 1937, Rock exasperated American consular officials by refusing to evacuate Yunnan. With half of China occupied and Chiang Kai-Shek's government beleaguered in Chongqing, Rock stayed on in Lijiang calmly consulting his sorcerer, raising vegetables in his garden, and listening to war bulletins on his shortwave radio.

Despite occasional scares, the fighting never reached Lijiang. Rock's decision to leave China in early 1944 was prompted by his constitutional restlessness rather than by fear of the Japanese. When he turned up in Calcutta, the U.S. Army Map Service immediately sought his expertise. American pilots were flying military supplies into China over the treacherous "Hump," and—his imperfect mapping techniques notwithstanding—Rock's familiarity with the mountains was valuable. Military officers hustled him aboard a top-priority flight to Washington and promised to ship his voluminous belongings after him. Rock arrived safely, but his possessions became war casualties when a Japanese torpedo sank the vessel that carried them. Among the items that drifted to the floor of the Arabian Sea were Rock's translations of religious ceremonies and a rough draft of the encyclopedia.

When word of the disaster reached Rock he nearly collapsed; later he would confide in friends that he had seriously considered suicide. He could not reconstruct the lost work from memory and, having already invested around \$18,000 of his savings in research, he was perilously short of funds. At sixty, he was too old to lead expeditions.

Rock spent most of the year fulfilling his obligations to the Army Map Service while plotting his path back to China. He traveled to Cambridge in late 1944 and told his sad story

to Serge Elisséeff, director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, who listened sympathetically. Elisséeff arranged for Harvard University Press to publish Rock's two volumes of Naxi history and considered financing his return to Yunnan to complete the dictionary. When Rock nearly bungled the opportunity by haggling over the terms, the diplomatic Harvard botanist Elmer D. Merrill interceded for his old friend and negotiated arrangements that paid Rock's way back to China in September, 1946.

Except for one brief interruption, Rock remained in Yunnan for almost three years, laboring under the most difficult circumstances he had ever encountered: civil war and inflation had created economic and administrative chaos in China, and bandits took advantage of the disorder, plundering at will. Even worse, Rock suffered from excruciating facial neuralgia which he never mentioned in his letters to Elisséeff for fear of being ordered back to the United States. Only when the pain became so intolerable that he could no longer chew solid foods did he fly to Boston for surgery, returning immediately to Lijiang once the problem was solved. His single piece of luck during this period was that he found the most efficient tomba he had yet to work with and was therefore able to progress rapidly.

Rock spent his last few weeks in Lijiang under a communist regime. The Naxi priests vanished overnight, Rock's interpreter with them. Some went underground; others were apparently killed. Naxi men who had been Rock's servants for years were jeered in public and labeled "imperialist lackeys." Though no one laid a hand on Rock or his belongings, his was clearly an unwanted presence, and his work came to a halt. He packed, presented his servants with small gifts, and departed reluctantly in early August, 1949. Two weeks later, he wrote Merrill, "I will see how things go during the next year and if all is O.K. will go back to [Lijiang] to finish my work...I want to die among those beautiful mountains rather than in a bleak hospital bed all alone." But China had slammed its doors on him, and Rock died in 1962 in a private home in Honolulu.

The final years in China had been sufficient for Rock to make up for the materials lost in the war and to collect documents so that he could finish his encyclopedia when he returned to the West. He arranged for publication of the work by Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente in Rome and subsidized the publisher with his own monies acquired from the sale of books and manuscripts. The first volume appeared the year after his death, the second in 1972. It is an immense work, at once a dictionary of the pictographic language of the Naxi religious texts and a description of a culture on the verge of extinction.

#### NOTES

- 1 Adapted by the author from her article: "Joseph Rock, 'Foreign Prince' of China's Western Provinces," Harvard Magazine, Jan-Feb, 1982.
- 2 Joseph Rock's personal diaries are kept at the library of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Scotland.

- 3 Edgar Snow, *Journey to the Beginning* (1958; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 56.
- 4 Rock's personal diaries, Edinburgh.
- 5 Joseph Rock, "Land of the Yellow Lama," *National Geographic*, 47 (1925): 451.
- 6 Rock to David Fairchild, April 22, 1923.

The Joseph F. Rock Collection, Records Library, National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.



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# CATALOG

The Realm of the Priest

The Realm of the Great Gods

The Realm of Nature

A Soul's Journey through the Six

Realms of Existence

Art Publishers



# The Realm of the Priest

Dongba priests are mediators between people and the forces beyond the human realm: gods, ghosts, ancestors, and the spirits of nature. But whether they perform ceremonies to propitiate heaven, heal the sick, or cast lots for the purpose of divination, the power of the Dongba priests resides in their books and mysterious scripts.



## 1 MANUSCRIPT COVER

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Ink and paint on paper

3 ½ x 10 ¼ in. (9 x 26 cm)

Private Collection

1.29

This manuscript belongs to the Heirleluke ceremony, dedicated to people who have committed suicide. It is one of the ceremonial texts chanted by a Dongba for young people who commit love suicide (yuvu). Catalog numbers 1 and 2 were collected by Joseph Rock and bear his cataloging tags.

# Art Publishers



## 2 A, B MANUSCRIPT COVERS

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Ink and paint on paper

3 7/8 x 11 in. (9.3 x 28 cm)

Private Collection

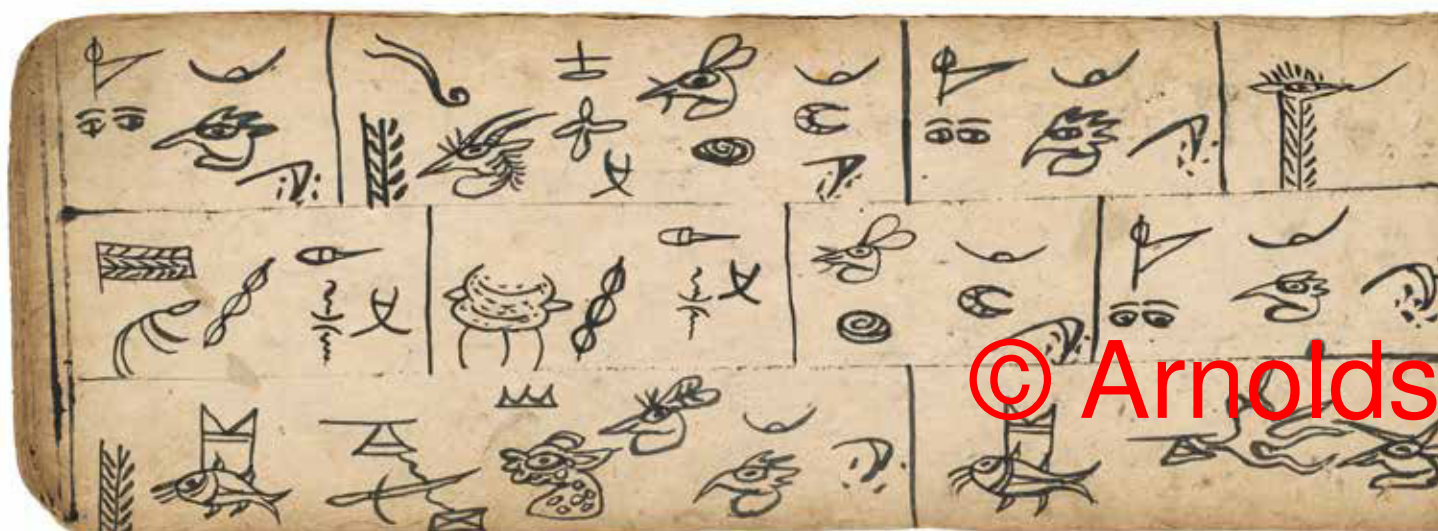
A. 2.68a; B. 2.69b

These manuscripts belong to the Onapiu ceremony, which is chanted to banish the demons of quarrel in the case of a serious dispute. A smaller ceremony called Operpiu is chanted to remove slander and curses.

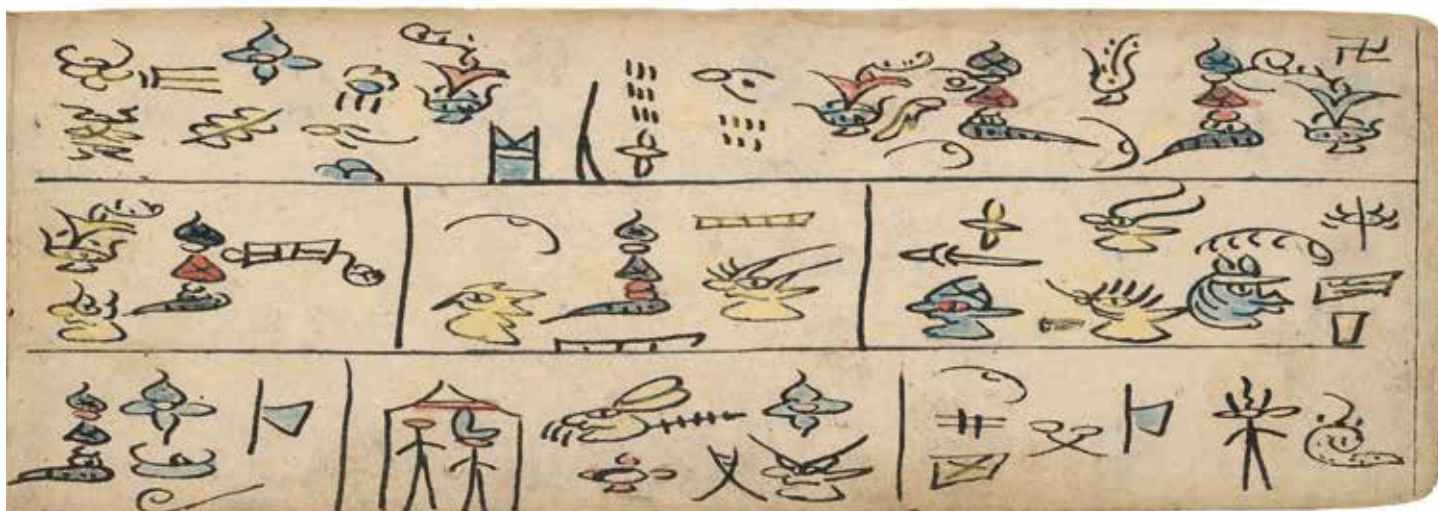




3A

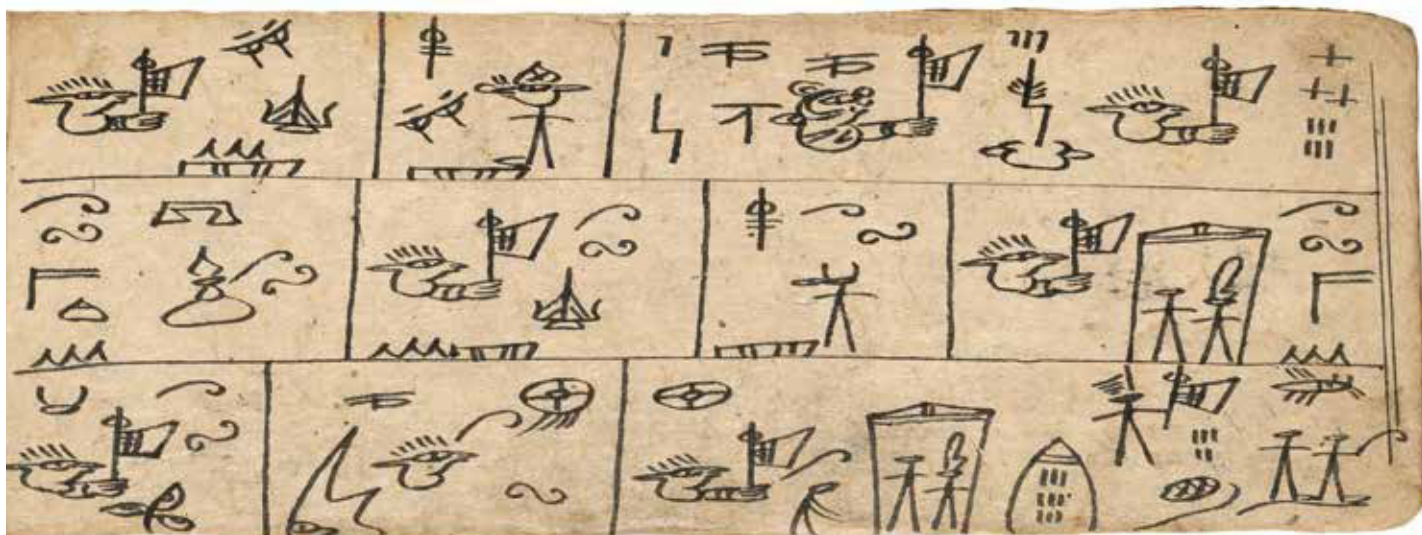


3B

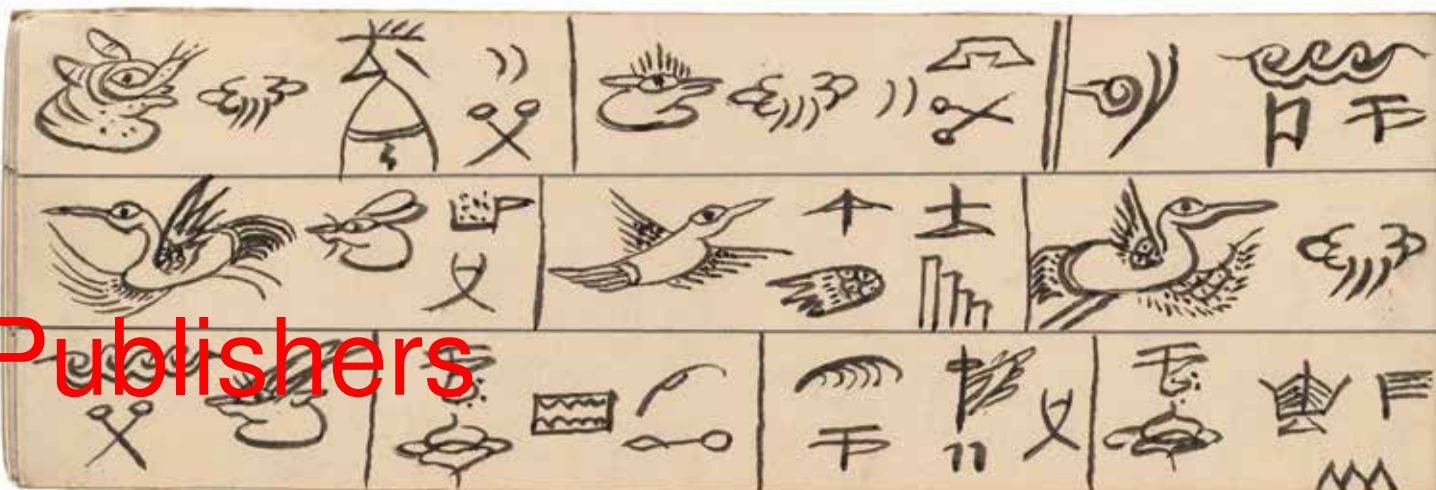


3C





3D



3E



3F

Art Publishers



3 A–F MANUSCRIPT PAGES

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Ink and paint on paper

Approximately 3 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 11 in. (9.3 x 28 cm) each

3 A–E Courtesy of the Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University

These six manuscript pages show different styles of pictographic writing. They are all ceremonial texts, except the last (3F, 2.69b), which is a divination text.

3 A Harvard-Yenching Library, A7

This manuscript belongs to the ceremony dedicated to Dongba Shilo, the Shilosi. It is used to exorcize demons.

3 B Harvard-Yenching Library, A22

This manuscript is also dedicated to Dongba Shilo and forms part of the funeral ceremony dedicated to a Dongba, called Shilonv. Dongba manuscripts are read left to right, but on this page, the pictographic text must be read from right to left until the fifth rubric.

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3 C Harvard-Yenching Library, B63

This is a page from a manuscript dedicated to the spirits of the natural world, or Naga cult, the Sigv.

3 D Harvard-Yenching Library, C17

This is a page from the Heirleluke ceremony, which is held for people who have committed suicide.

3 E Harvard-Yenching Library, K38

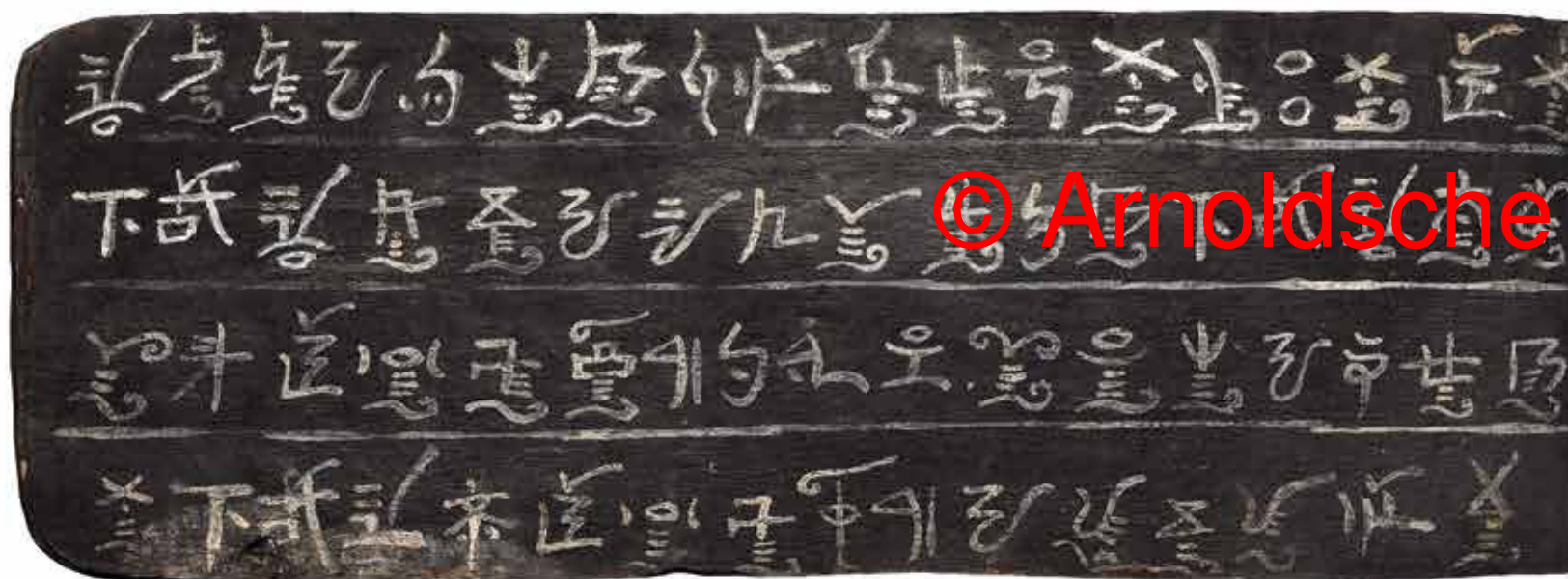
This is also a manuscript belonging to the funeral ceremony held for people who died when still relatively young. The book relates how the Naxi first learned to sing and dance in order to send the souls of their departed onward. The book gives the rules of the dance.

3 F Private Collection, 2.69b

This manuscript is a divination text. The text is written in its entirety and not as a mnemonic shorthand.







5 A, B MANUSCRIPT PAGES  
Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
Ink and paint on paper  
Approximately 3 1/2 x 10 1/8 in. (9 x 25.8 cm) each  
Private Collection  
A. 2.60b; B. 1.848e

These manuscripts are divination texts. They are written in the geba script and consist of magic formulae. These books originate from the southern regions of Lijiang and near Lijiang town.

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely Korean, on a light-colored strip. The text is organized into five horizontal lines, with vertical red lines separating the columns. The characters are fluid and stylized, characteristic of traditional Korean calligraphy.

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely Korean, on a dark-colored strip. The text is organized into four horizontal lines. The characters are fluid and stylized, characteristic of traditional Korean calligraphy. A red watermark "Art Publishers" is visible across the middle of the strip.





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## 6 DIVINATION CARDS

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

1500?-1934

Ink, paint, and paper

7 1/2 x 3 3/4 in. (19 x 9.5 cm) each

Library of Congress, Asian Division, 2466

NZ0007

Divination cards come in sets of various numbers. The larger sets have a maximum of forty cards, and smaller sets usually around twenty. The figure at the top of the card shows the deity—for example, the protective Yuma, or the Naga serpent deity, or the sacred influence (the conch shell)—at work in the divination process. These cards are inscribed with some geba syllabic symbols among the pictographs, which shows they come from the region of Lijiang. When consulting a Dongba for divination, the client must come with payment or an offering for the deities, which remains with the Dongba. The client informs the priest of the general nature of the problem, whether it is a health, financial, or family matter. The Dongba chants from a manuscript and holds the cards together, with the strings toward the client. When the time is right, the client pulls on one of the strings and draws out a card. The Dongba then consults the card, explains the problem, and advises a solution, which may include a method of resolving the problem, a ritual, or in the case of health matters, a medicinal remedy.



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Detail

# 7 A, B RITUAL BANNERS

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Ink and paint on fabric

Approximately 38 ¾ x 7 ¾ in. (98.4 x 18.7 cm)

38 9/16 x 79 1/16 in. (99.4 x 201 cm)

Collection of the daughters of Quentin Roosevelt

Painted ritual banners may be hung in pairs on either side of the altar. These banners depict dragons and protective celestial Dongbas.



# Art Publishers



7A



7B



8A



8B

## 8 A, B RITUAL BANNERS

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Ink and paint on fabric

Approximately  $36 \frac{1}{4} \times 6 \frac{3}{16}$  in. (92.1 x 15.6 cm)

Approximately  $37 \frac{1}{8} \times 6 \frac{3}{8}$  in. (94.3 x 16.2 cm)

Collection of the daughters of Quentin Roosevelt



# The Realm of the Great Gods

As in other animistic religions, in the Dongba religion cosmology attributes a benevolent and malevolent spirit to all things that can be named, that is, all the things that the Naxi know exist, including living organisms, seasonal phenomena, the orientation of space, and inanimate objects. The Naxi thus acknowledge hundreds of deities, spirits, and demons, who inhabit various domains and hierarchical realms. At the highest level of this pantheon are the Great Gods of Heaven. The Dongba priests may paint representations of the Great Gods on cards or in larger and elaborate paintings called za or thangkas (which Rock and Roosevelt called banners). These images are not intended for decorative or meditative purposes; they are “living representations” of the deities the priests invoke during the ceremony. As they represent the higher gods, these images must always be placed at a high level in the ritual space, usually above the altar.



Detail

## 9 SOYIWADE

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
Ground mineral pigment on cloth  
35 4/5 x 20 in. (91 x 51 cm)  
Private Collection  
HAR 81565

Soyiwade is one of three highest gods of the Dongba pantheon. He sits on a lotus throne and wears a five-lobed crown. At his left shoulder is a dharma wheel (kalu) and at his right a mystic jewel (nibu). Under his throne are two lions and on each side a goddess, which the Naxi call Lamumi, from the Tibetan Lhamo with the feminine Naxi suffix mi. In the top row are the gods of the five elements. The nine warriors, swords raised, are the makers of heaven. They are called Persojiujiu. Seven female makers of the earth, called Shamishejiu, are depicted on the bottom row. A cuckoo bird faces the reliquary (chorten).



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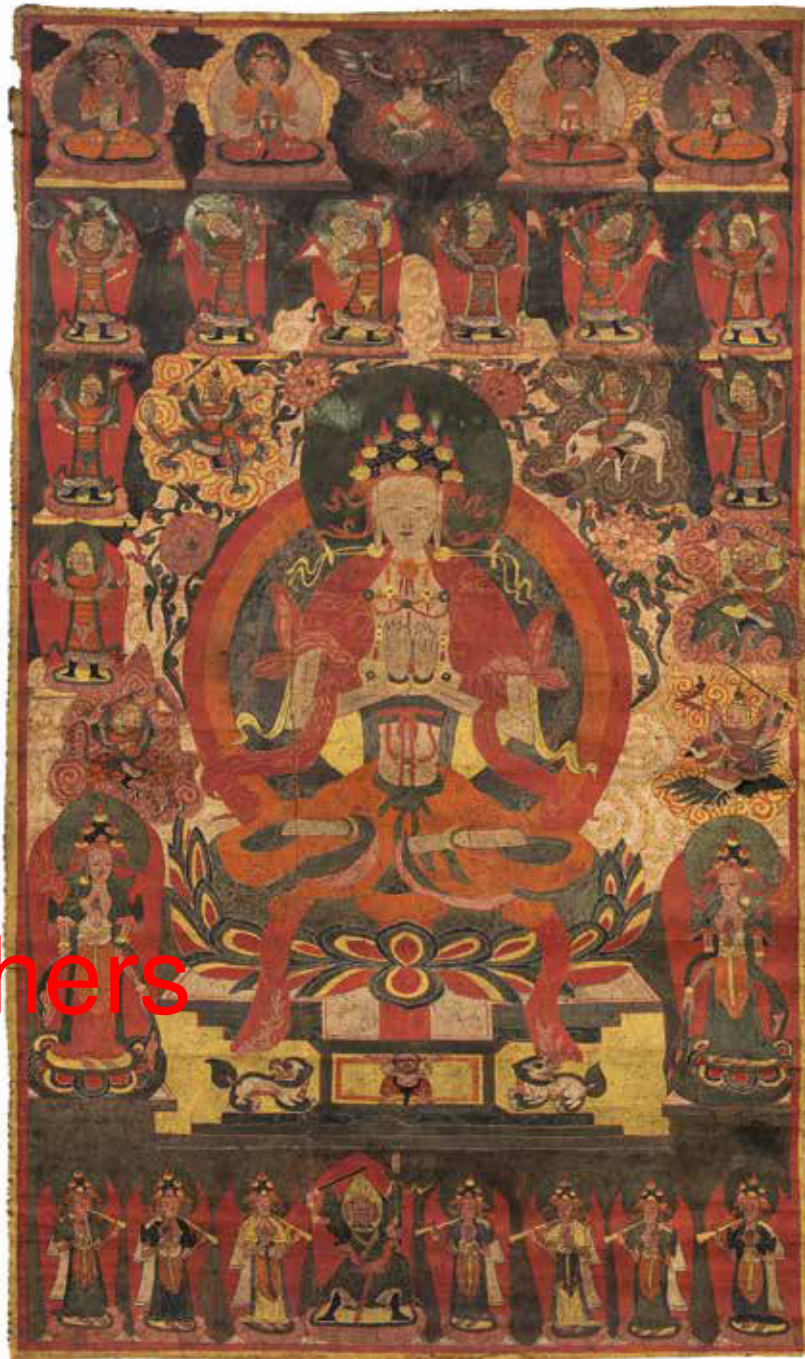


# 10 SOYIWADE

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
 Paint and gesso on cloth  
 53 ¾ x 34 ½ in. (136.6 x 87.5 cm)  
 Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology  
 39-94-60/6048

Above the great god Soyi Wade are a dragon, a lion, and Garuda. Eight guardian archers surround Soyi Wade and below his throne is Meebeizisi, a celestial Dongba holding a feather and a flat bell. This dancing figure may also be identified as Leijiujijiu, the warrior deity, defender of the gods, who crushes ghosts and demons. On the bottom row, at either side, are four goddesses.

# Art Publishers



## 11 SOYIWADE

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
Ground mineral pigment on cloth  
39<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> x 23<sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> in. (101 x 60.5 cm)  
Private Collection  
HAR 81560

The great god Soyiwade sits on a lotus throne supported by two lions.





Detail

© Arnoldsche

## 12 O'PER

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Ground mineral pigment on cloth

39 x 23 <sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> in. (99.5 x 60.5 cm)

Private Collection

HAR 81558

This painting represents the great god O'Per (the god with the white bones) who with Soyiwade and Yigu'agu is one of the three highest gods in the Dongba pantheon. O'Per sits in the samadhi posture, with both hands in his lap. Above him are Garuda and the gods of the five directions mounted on their respective animals. The gods of the five elements are in the top row. The artist was evidently concerned with symmetry, which takes precedence over mythological reckoning. The nine male makers of the sky (here they are ten) are on either side of him dressed in armor. A Lamu goddess is on either side of his throne, and below them are Yuma deities. In the bottom row are the seven female makers of the earth, who in this case are represented as eight goddesses.



Art Publishers





Detail

© Arnoldsche

### 13 LACHIDOMI

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
Ground mineral pigment on cloth  
35 x 20 1/10 in. (103 x 58.5 cm)  
Private Collection  
HAR 81556

The great god Lachidomi is invoked during the ceremony to obtain longevity, the Sizhupiu. There is a goddess on either side of him. Lachidomi is surrounded by protective deities and spirits of victory, called Ngola, mounted on various animals, and by seated, dancing, and mounted Dongbas wielding ritual instruments. Above him is a dragon, a lion, and Garuda. Below the throne are two white cranes, and below those an altar with bumpa vases and an incense burner. On the left, near the altar, is the white bat, Heiyiziboaper, the messenger to the gods, and on the other side, kneeling with offerings, is the god Lawolasa. At the top corners are manifestations of Dalamibbu (the Bon flaming tiger god Tagla Membar). At the bottom corners are a tiger and a white yak. The five figures seated in the top row, between the tiger gods, are the gods of the five directions: Nimatusiggo (east); Yichimeemiggo (south); Meeneidiuliugvggo (center); Nimagvshuggo (west); Hogulojjiggo (north). At left, in the sixth row from the top, is the eastern celestial Dongba Geceiceibu riding a tiger, and on the right is the southern celestial Dongba Serimugu riding a dragon. On the left, third row from the bottom, is the northern celestial Dongba Gvseichaba who rides a porcupine, and on the right the western Naseichulu who rides an elephant. Garuda represents the central element, and its associated celestial Dongba is Soyuziggiu.



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Detail

# 14 ZONADOCHI

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
 Ground mineral pigment on cloth  
 38 1/5 x 22 2/5 in. (97 x 57 cm)  
 Private Collection  
 HAR 81561

This thangka of the Naga god called Zonadochi is used during ceremonies dedicated to the Si spirits, or Nagas, in conjunction with paintings of Garuda. Zonadochi rises from a lotus with water beneath it. His headdress is adorned with jewels. All around him are mountains, wild animals, and smaller Nagas holding auspicious objects. The standing goddesses are surrounded by jewels and auspicious treasures. Nagas are the owners of the wild domain, including mountains, forests, and waterways and all the wild animals. The Naxi propitiate the Nagas to obtain health, longevity, and wealth.



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Detail

© Arnoldsche

# 15 DONGBA SHILO

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Ground mineral pigment on cloth

35<sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> x 20<sup>1</sup>/<sub>10</sub> in. (90 x 51 cm)

Private Collection

HAR 81554

Dongba Shilo, patron deity of the Dongba priests and founder of the Dongba religion, is the Naxi version of Shenrab Mibo, the founder of Bon. Dongba Shilo has a green body (the color associated with the south) and sits between two white elephants on a lotus thrown supported by three dharma wheels (kalu). He is seated as the Buddha, in the earth touching pose calling the earth to witness. His right hand is empty, unlike Shenrab in the Bon tradition, who holds a scepter. The gods of the five elements preside in the top row of the painting. Two dragons stand at Shilo's shoulders; above them is a waterfall and below them two lions. Below Shilo's throne, in the center, is his white horse. Nine of his three hundred sixty disciples (dizi geba) are dancing below him. They are holding flat bells (the Dongba zara and the Bon zhang), hand drums (dabbalar), and swords. Two other disciples are seated at either side of his shoulders, and Shilo's parents are below them. Two Shilo goddesses (Shilo's sisters or wives) stand next to this throne. Thangkas of Dongba Shilo are used in almost all Dongba ceremonies.



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16 DONGBA MEEBEIZISI

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Paint on cloth

59 x 27 ¼ in. (150 cm x 69.3 cm)

Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology

39-94-60.6051

The celestial Dongba Meebeizisi is shown here dancing on a lotus throne and crushing a demon underfoot. Above him are a dragon, a lion, and Garuda. His throne is surrounded by clouds as befits his celestial status. He holds a flat bell (zara) in his left hand and a peacock feather in his right. He is surrounded by dancing Dongbas. In the bottom row are shown (from left to right) a tiger, two birds, a kneeling figure with offerings next to a saddled horse, and a white yak. The god in this thangka was also identified by the Dongba and Naxi scholar He Limin as Leijiujiujiu, another celestial Dongba who leads the Beida warrior gods, who are protectors of Dongba Shilo. Both Leijiujiujiu and Meebeizisi preside over exorcisms.

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Details

# 17 NATOSA

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
Ground mineral pigment on cloth  
28<sup>3</sup>/<sub>10</sub> x 20<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (72 x 52 cm)  
Private Collection  
HAR 81557

This thangka represents Natosa, the Naxi god of wealth. This is actually a close representation of the Tibetan god of wealth Zambhala (also Vaisravana), who is depicted sitting on a lion, holding a parasol or umbrella in his right hand and a mongoose in his left, although the small animal in Natosa's hand looks more like a piglet than a mongoose. The mongoose in Tibetan and Hindu mythology is the natural enemy of Nagas, who give up their wealth for the benefit of humanity. Natosa is surrounded by the Dongbas of the five directions: top left is Serimugu, the southern celestial Dongba, riding a dragon; to the right is the western Dongba Naseichulu on the white elephant; between them is Soyuziggiu, the Dongba of the center, riding Garuda; in the bottom row the eastern Dongba Geceiceibu rides a tiger, and the northern Dongba Gvseichaba rides a porcupine. A Dongba stands at Natosa's side, holding an arrow pointing to the ground (the place of the Nagas). He holds a flat bell in his left hand.



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Detail

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# 18 TUCHI YUMA

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Ground mineral pigment on cloth

36 <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> x 23 <sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> in. (101 x 60.5 cm)

Private Collection

HAR 81553

The large central figure in this thangka is Tuchi Yuma. Yuma are the equivalent to the Tibetan Werma. They are winged protective deities and number three hundred sixty. Tuchi Yuma is the highest of all the Yuma. He has three eyes and a lion face and wears a tiger skin around his hips. He carries a sword in his right hand and a trident in his left. He tramples demons underfoot. In the top row are Garuda, a dragon, and a lion. The sitting deities on either side in the top part of the painting are Tuchi Yuma's mother, Micohuamu, and on the right, his father, Soyiwade. The deities dancing below his throne are Dalamibbu (the Dongba version of the Bon flaming-tiger god Tagla Membar), Kozi Yuma (horn headed-Yuma), Tuchi Yuma, and Bberzi Yuma (striped Yuma). In the bottom row, center, are the gates of Tuchi Yuma's realm, guarded by a tiger and a yak, above which are three weapons: a trident, a sword, and an arrow.



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Detail

# 19 HEIYIJIUKU

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
 Ground mineral pigment on cloth  
 39 1/8 x 23 7/8 in. (99.4 x 60.6 cm)  
 Private Collection  
 HAR 81562

Heiyijiuku, one of the Dongba religion's fearful deities, has nine heads and eighteen arms, although only sixteen are represented here. He resembles the wrathful Bon deities Welsé Ngampa and Welchen Gekhö. He holds a trident in his left hand and a sword in his right. He stands on a lotus throne and is surrounded by Dongbas, warriors, and other smaller fearful deities.



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Detail

© Arnoldsche

## 20 BAWUA YUMA

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China; 19<sup>th</sup> century

Ground mineral pigment on cloth

38½ x 28 in. (97.8 x 71.1 cm)

Collection of Shelley and Donald Rubin

HAR 200001

Bawua Yuma is one of the great Yuma. The Yuma, who number three hundred sixty, are winged protective deities with animal heads. Other winged deities are the Terko, with bird heads. Bawua Yuma has a lion face and three eyes. He wears a flaming headdress with jewels, a snake necklace, and a leopard garment. He holds a sword in his right hand and a trident in his left and rides a tiger, crushing and spearing two demons. The great gods Soyiwade, O'Per, and Garuda are depicted above him. Surrounding him are other Yuma with, on the right in the last row, Tuchi Yuma, the highest ranking Yuma. Below him is the semi naked figure of Gewuladdo, who is seen forging weapons for the Yuma, and opposite him on the left is a Dongba, called Chouxujjibber, who strikes the ground with an arrow and performs the rituals to remove pollution. In the bottom rows a tiger, the white bat Heiyiziboaper, a white eagle, a naked figure who may be Gewuladdo's assistant, and a white yak surround the gate of a temple.



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Details



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## 21 HEIRLELUKE CEREMONY THANGKA

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Ground mineral pigment on cloth

35 x 20 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>10</sub> in. (89 x 51.5 cm)

Private Collection

HAR 81555

This thangka would be hung in the ritual space during the Heirleluke ceremony, dedicated to people who have committed suicide. In the top row there are a dragon, a lion, and Garuda. In the next row down are the gods Zhuashi, Yishi, and Mingyu, who are always depicted together. The great god Yigu'agu practiced magic and three white eggs appeared. From these eggs emerged Zhuashi, Yishi, and Mingyu. The triad is invoked during the Sizhupiu ceremony to obtain long lives for those who have attended a funeral. In the second row from the top are Heiyijiuku, Dongba Shilo, and Gogvzi Yuma (the hawk-headed Yuma). In the last row are Meebeizisi, Tuchi Yuma, and Kozher, the four-headed archer who controls the Heirleluke ceremony. Kozher was born from the union of the god Tutugiuyu and the daughter of a Naga called Yimeitozi. With his four pairs of eyes, he stares at the evil spirits and terrifies them. He also wears armor and shoots down the demons of suicide. At the bottom row are a tiger and white yak, guarding the gates to the realm of the gods.



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## 22 RITUAL CARDS

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
 Watercolor on hemp paper and jute?  
 11 x 4<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (28 x 11 cm) each  
 Collection of Dr. John M. Lundquist  
 JL7

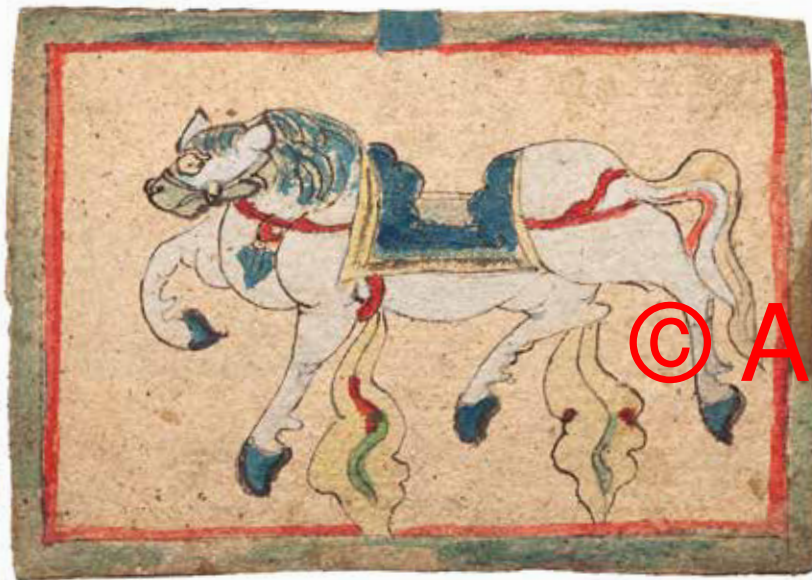
These cards represent Dongba high gods in the top row and below them celestial Dongbas and protective deities. Representations of high gods cannot be placed on the floor or against offerings and must be strung above the altar. In the top row the deities are, from left to right : 1 an unidentified deity, holding a Bon swastika and other objects, reminiscent of the Bon deity Künzang Gyalpa Düpa; 2 the great god O'Per; 3 the great god Soyiwade; 4 an unidentified great god; 5 the great god Labatage, who is the Dongba of the gods; 6 Shijia-tobba (Sakiamuni); 7 Dongba Shilo; 8 Garuda; 9 Hayikekiu; and 10 Tuchi Yuma.





# The Realm of Nature

The realm of nature lies in opposition to the realm of humanity, the world where people live. Nature, in this sense, is wilderness unmediated by civilization: the place of wild animals, undomesticated birds, snakes, and fish and their respective spirits. The world of nature is the domain of the Nagas—the dragons and snake spirits the Naxi call Lee and Si—who reside in streams, under stones, in trees, and underground. The Nagas are the lords of the soil and the owners of all the animals, plants, rocks, and waterways, and there are Naga gods and Naga demons, or Naga ghosts. In the realm of nature, the Naxi must hunt animals, collect medicinal plants, graze their herds, and plow fields. The Dongba priests conduct rituals to propitiate and exorcize the Nagas, to repay them for encroaching on their land, and to obtain fertility and health for people. If the Dongba priests fail to propitiate these spirits of nature, the Nagas will cause drought and illness among humanity.



1

## 23 RITUAL CARDS

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
Watercolor on hemp paper?  
vertical cards 8 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 6 in. (22.5 x 15 cm)  
horizontal card 6 x 8 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (15 x 22 cm)  
Collection of Dr. John M. Lundquist  
JL2

These ritual cards from a set of twenty-four are meant to be placed in baskets of rice offerings. They are intended for propitiating the spirits of the natural world, and depict animals with hooves, animals with claws, and animals that fly. The style is representative of the region of Muli north of Lijiang. Card 4 depicts Garuda, Kiut'kiu, below him is the cuckoo with a beautiful voice, Wohajiaper. Card 6 represents Gobuta, a celestial Dongba, and a disciple of Dongba Shilo. The reliquary (chorten) shown in card 2 is in Buddhist style, as opposed to Bon style: the Buddhist chorten have a sun and moon at their top; the Bon chorten have horns.





2



3



4



5



6



7

Art Publishers





## 24 RITUAL CARDS

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
 Watercolor on hemp paper and string  
 13 x 4 1/8 in. (33 x 10.5 cm) each  
 Collection of Dr. John M. Lundquist  
 JL9

These cards are meant to be strung above an altar. The top row shows the front of the cards, the bottom row the back. Except for the second card, which depicts the bat, the cards are painted with wild birds. Both sides depict the same motifs but are painted in two strikingly different styles. These cards are used in rituals dedicated to the propitiation of the spirits of nature and also for ceremonies asking for longevity, the Sizhupiu. Each bird is shown with two symbols—a treasure: mystic wheel, umbrella, endless knot, conch shell, banner, flower, and lamp; and a symbol of its living environment, represented by an animal (lion, dragon, fish) or a natural element or feature (water, mountains, trees).





Front

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Back

25 A–F SET OF KOBUI

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Ink on wood

Collection of the daughters of Quentin Roosevelt

© Arnoldsche

The Dongba priests call these painted ritual slats kobui. The kobui are the counterpart of thangkas. Whereas the thangkas are representations of gods on high, kobui are always associated with the realm of nature and the Nagas, and whereas thangkas must hang above the ritual space, kobui must be planted in the ground for Nagas are the lords of the soil.

25 A KOBUI

21 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (54.9 cm)

This is an unusually shaped kobui inscribed with Naxi pictographs.

25 B–E KOBUI

B. 20 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (51.8 cm); C. 21 in. (53.3 cm); D. 20 in. (50.8 cm); E. 21 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (53.7 cm)

These kobui are monochrome. They represent the wild animals that the Naxi may hunt: animals with hooves, animals with claws, and animals that fly, or birds.

25 F KOBUI

21 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (54.9 cm)

This kobui represents a Naga deity who must be propitiated by a Dongba priest.



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25A

25B

25C

25D

25E

25F

© Arnoldsche

26 A–E SET OF KOBIU

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Wood, paint

24 x 4 ½ x ½ in. (61 x 11.4 x 1.4 cm)

Quentin Roosevelt Collection

Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University

39-93-60/6013.1—5

The Nagas depicted on kobius B and D are Naga gods. The central kobiu shows the five auspicious symbols or treasures—from the top: lamp, conch, knot, flower, and vase. The kobiu on the far left shows animals with hooves and with claws, and that on the far right, animals that fly, crawl, and swim. The combination of these animals represents the completeness of the world of nature.

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# A Soul's Journey through the Six Realms of Existence

All people must die, but in the Dongba religion death is not simply the ending of life: it is a passage into other realms of being. Thus, funeral rites are performed in order to transform the souls of the departed into ancestor souls who will protect their living relatives; individuated souls who may be reincarnated; or celestial souls who will take their place in the realm of the gods.



© Arnoldsche

Detail

## 27 RITUAL CARDS

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
Watercolor on hemp paper?  
8<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 4 in. (22 x 10 cm) each  
Collection of Dr. John M. Lundquist  
JL5

These ritual cards represent animal-headed deities and their animal-spirit manifestations. Card 1 is the lion-headed Bawu Yuma; 5 is Garuda; and 6 is the tiger god Dalamibbu. All the deities in this set are war gods, and the cards were painted to exorcise ghosts and demons, perhaps for use at a funeral. This set is an example of individual creativity in Dongba art. Without precise knowledge of the manuscripts that inspired the cards, it is very difficult for another Dongba priest to identify with certainty the deities represented.





1



2



3



4



5



6

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## 28 FUNERAL RITUAL CARDS

Northwestern Yunnan Province, China

Ink and paint on paper

11 ¼ x 3 ½ in. (28.5 x 9 cm) each

Library of Congress, Asian Division, 2601

NZ0013

This is a set of funeral ritual cards depicting musical players. It is a beautiful example of the innovative freedom and creative powers of Dongba art. The Dongba priest who composed the cards appears to have drawn inspiration from the section of a funeral scroll that depicts the players of funeral music. These cards may be hung in the ritual space or placed around the ritual objects. Below Dongba Shilo (who is shown on the fifth card, this page) is a demon, painted in the typical style of the hell scenes of funeral scrolls. The backs of all the cards but two are decorated with treasures: flowers, umbrella, banner, knots, bumpa





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vase, dharma wheels, conch shell, and double-fish. In the bottom row, the second card from the left, previous page, shows the mongoose of the god of wealth Zambhala spitting jewels (see Cat. No. 17), and on card 5 below Dongba Shilo, Garuda (Kiut'kiu) and a peacock eating a snake. According to Dongba He Limin, this set of cards is especially intriguing and precious. The dancing figure carrying the offerings (first card this page) is exceptional as no such dancers are seen at Dongba funerals. Some of the instruments depicted in these cards are likewise not usually associated with Dongba music. The figure on the fifth card from left, this page, is playing a Tibetan Buddhist drum, which the Naxi call lebawu. Among the Naxi this drum is a folk instrument typically played by women. The yunluo on the first card and the pipa on the last card are associated with Taoist music rather than Dongba music. The pipa is also highly unusual in that it has six strings. The bottom row shows the back of the cards.

29 FUNERAL SCROLL (Hei Zhi Pi)  
Northwestern Yunnan Province, China  
Ink and paint on fabric  
40 ft. x 11 ½ in. (1219 x 29.2 cm)  
Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University  
FHCL:3322112

At the core of the funeral ritual is a long scroll called Hei Zhi Pi, or Road of the Gods, and eight ceremonies are attached to it. Dongba funeral scrolls recall the Tibetan Wheel of Existence and Chinese hell scrolls. They also share some significant iconographic motifs with Burmese iconography. But even as these funeral scrolls show the influence of neighboring cultures and civilizations, none of the Naxi's neighbors—Han, Tibetan, Burmese, Pumi, Lisu, Yi, Mosuo, or Bai—possess such scrolls. The Hei Zhi Pi are unique to the Dongba religion.

Hei Zhi Pi measure up to forty feet in length and are about a foot wide. They are rolled out from the head of a coffin into a northeastern direction. When the Dongba priest sends the soul onward, he chants from the ritual manuscripts, pointing to relevant parts on the scroll. The ceremonial texts relate Dongba Shilo's journey into the afterlife and the multitude of sacrifices offered to demons and gods along the way. The departed souls of the Naxi journey on the road first traveled by Dongba Shilo in the six realms of existence and possible rebirth. With the help of the Dongba priests, they pass through the many places of torments and suffering in the realm of hell (Niwua), the realm of the demons and hungry ghosts (Yidda), the realm of the beasts (Xuzuo), the human world (Bbeizissidiu), and the titans or asuras (lamaye or homaye)—until they finally reach the sixth and peaceful realm of the gods (Heiddiu).

The Dongba tradition has a number of funeral ceremonies, and most of them require the use of the Hei Zhi Pi. All Hei Zhi Pi depict the six realms of existence and a number of set motifs, such as the Garuda, the wishing tree, the golden elephant with the thirty-three heads, the tree of spikes. However, the Hei Zhi Pi also come in many iconographic and artistic variations: the number of gods, the number of mountains and lakes, the types of animals, and the types of punishments may vary. Above all, there are significant differences in artistic execution, reflecting the artist-priests' individual talents and inspiration, local styles, and no doubt also the evolution of the Dongba artistic tradition over time.

#### BOTTOM SEGMENT

This part of the Hei Zhi Pi is called Bbunagvbbu, the Nine Black Hills. It consists of a short scroll, sometimes detached from the longer scroll but never used separately. The Bbunagvbbu depicts the road to the gates of the first realm of hell. Each hill is guarded on both sides by a lachou demon who holds a flour dtorma, a demon offering. The lachou embody the sins committed by the deceased during their lifetimes, and which are now blocking the road. The Dongba priest propitiates the lachou demons and makes them harmless, allowing the soul to move through.



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Bottom



The funeral scrolls are viewed from the bottom (representing hell) to the top (representing heaven). This scroll is laid out in 15 sections, shown from the bottom of the scroll to the top.





Detail

This segment depicts the first two realms of hell, Niwua and Yidda, where the Dongba priest guides the soul to safety through the various places of torture. The detail above shows the tree of spikes, the demon king Dtisoggemee with his axe, and at the left his wife, Dtissoggemi, with a sword. The mythical black bird Shoshona is at the top of the tree.





Continuation from page 179





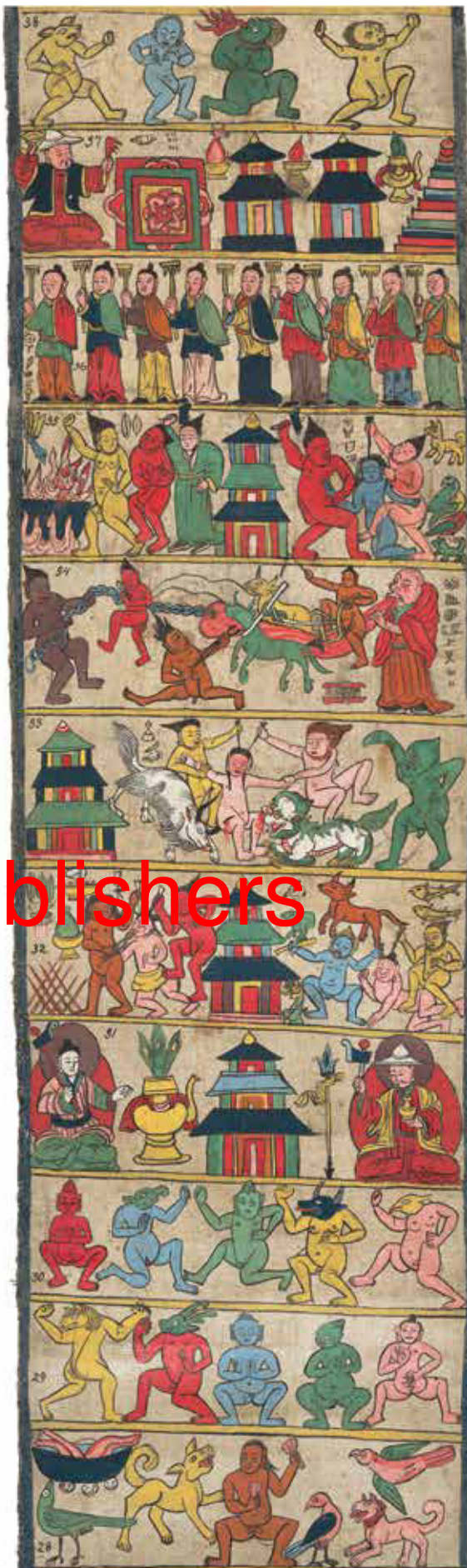


Detail

The section at near right represents the realm of the beasts. In the third segment from the top, women holding rakes are perhaps priestesses. The section at the far right (bottom two segments) ends the realm of the beasts. The soul is shown being dragged by the hair and bound by five animal-headed demons—yaks, dog, pig, snake, and ox. Above them, the realm of humanity and rebirth, Bbeizissediu, begins. The first level depicts the place of the thirteen lamps (shown far right and in the detail above).



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Continuation from page 181







Detail

In the segment at the near right, the soul has entered the lamaye or homaye, the realm of the titans. Dongba Shilo rides a blue horse. The soul depicted by the naka thread effigy rides the white horse before him. The segment at the far right shows the Seven Golden Mountains and Seven Blue Lakes, which are depicted at the end of the lamaye. The mountain represents the center of the world and the axis mundi between heaven and earth. A tiger stands at each of the mountains. A frog sits in the fifth lake. General iconographic standards and the text from the manuscript usually place the frog in the first lake.





Continuation from page 183



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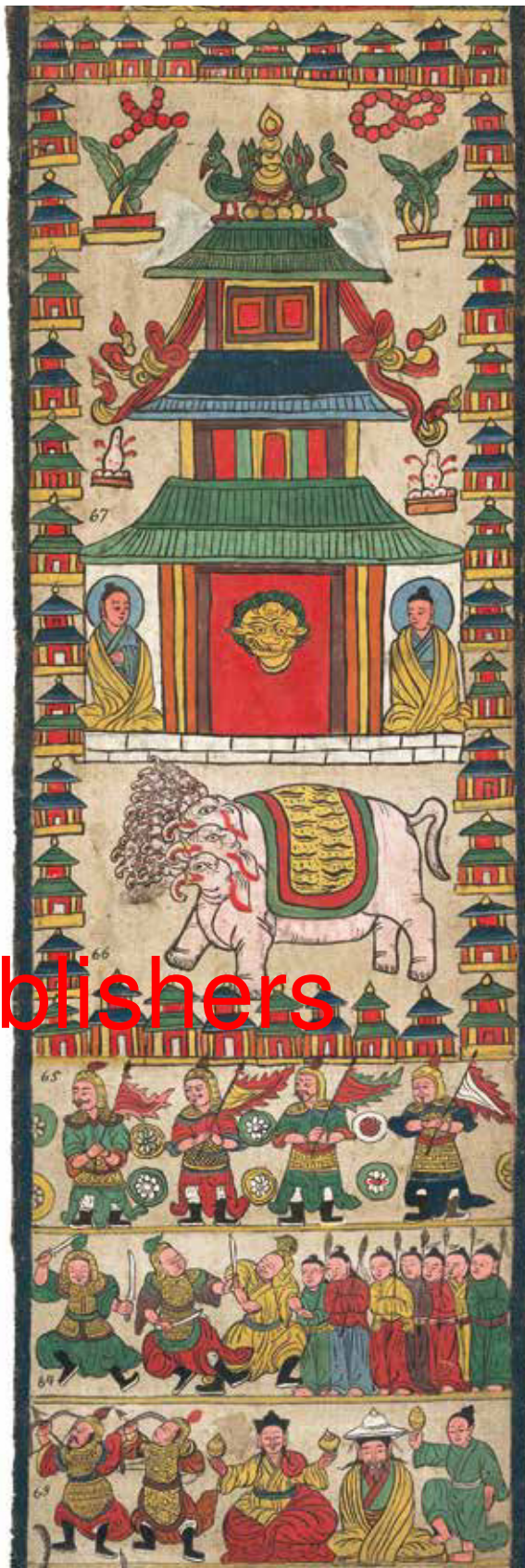




Detail

In this section of the scroll, the soul enters the realm of the gods (Heiddiu). In the bottom rows, Dongba priests, archers, and soldiers stand at the gates. According to Dongba He Limin, the priests in the yellow robes on either side of the temple (top segment, near right) may be Buddhist monks rather than Dongbas. The detail above depicts the place of the thirty-three temples and of the golden elephant with the thirty-three heads, called Hashicozzi. Hashicozzi is especially intriguing, as he is mentioned only in the manuscripts pertaining to the funeral scrolls and in no others. Joseph Rock discovered a counterpart to Hashicozzi in Burmese cosmography. There is also mention of an elephant with thirty-three heads in the lore of the ancient kingdoms of Laos and Thailand.





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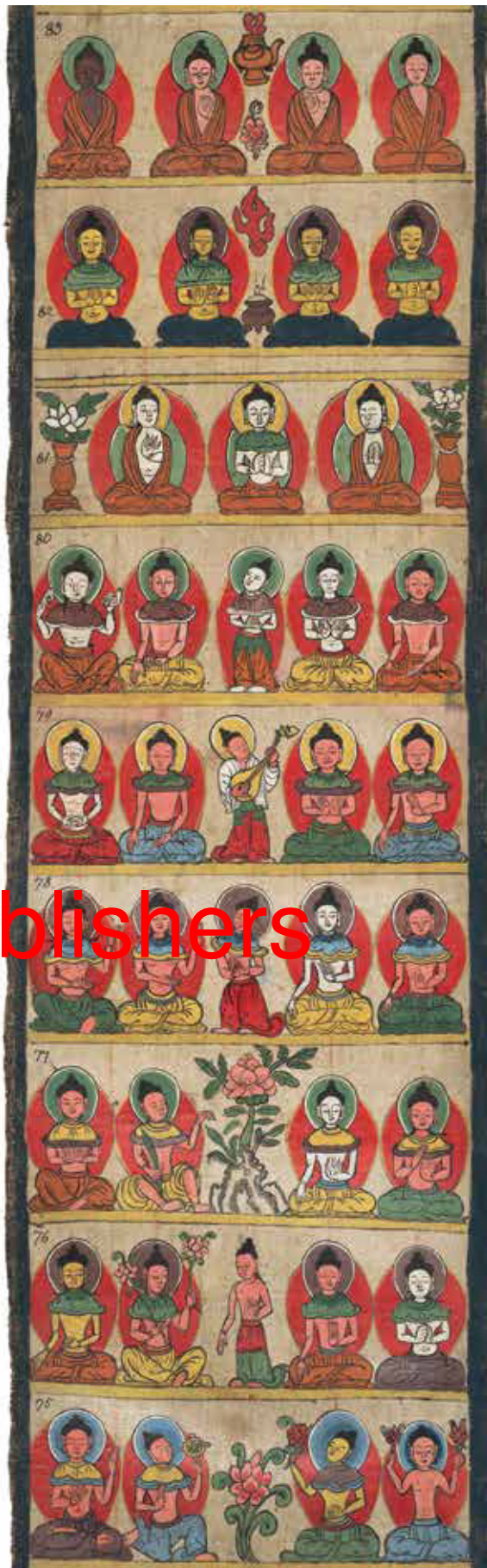


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Detail

The segments on the right depict the thirty-three realms of the gods in the Heiddiu. This detail from the segment at far right, previous page, depicts the White Garuda, Duper Kiut'kiu, sitting at the top of the wish-granting tree Hayiboaddazher. When the soul arrives at the place of Garuda, all the obstacles have been removed from the road.





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These sections show the last levels of the realm of the gods. The deities' names are inscribed in pictographs and at times in geba symbols, indicating that this scroll belonged to a Dongba from the region around the town of Lijiang. The names of the two highest gods below Soyiwade (at top) are from left to right the great gods Amei Jimawatse and Ase Kajjigubbe, the mother and father of Yigu'agu, the first cause. Flowers surround the deities and other auspicious symbols are shown below them, including the swastika (yidua), which is shown turning clockwise in Buddhist fashion. Dongba Shilo has a green body (bottom, near right).



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